

# SYNERGY MAGAZINE



**VOLUME 1: NO.3**

**EXPLORING THE BOUNDARIES OF CINEMA AND LITERATURE**

## HALLOWEEN SPECIAL EDITION

**Not Quite Hollywood**  
Ozploitation Cinema

**Thinking Time**  
Docos in Review: From Aleister Crowley  
to Feminism and Sex !! From Albert Fish  
to War !

**Indie Films & Shorts**  
From Gay Zombies & Zombie Love to  
Hell Hamsters , Jekyll and Hyde and  
Xmas Trees taking Revenge !!

**Mondo Collecting**

**The Rage**  
Kurtzman's Ultra Gorefest !

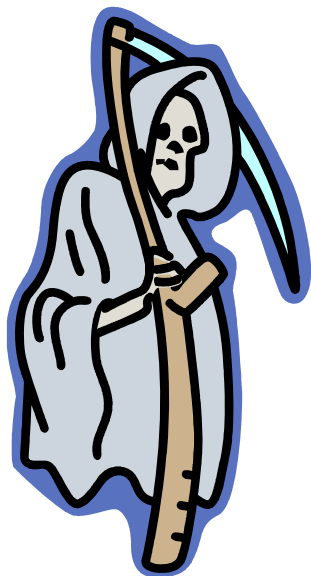
**Vampires & Sex !**

**Tech: Squeezebox Boom !**  
Ultimate Network Music Device !

**Packed with Reviews!**  
Books, Magazines, Comics, Art,  
DVDs, Music and Collectibles....

**HORROR**  
**CULT**  
**DARK ART**  
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# EDITORIAL

What a year it has been !

Synergy has been going from strength to strength.

We expanded and refined the website and moved our updates to a daily basis to a great response. We also changed the byline of the magazine to "*exploring the boundaries of cinema and literature*" and have included all sorts of new subjects in our range.

We now regularly review a wide range of books, music, art, toys and collectables, magazines and of course, cinema and DVD. We have continued our focus on the unusual, cult and dark but at the same time given solid coverage to documentaries (see our new "Thinking Time !" Section), art-house and world cinema.

We have continued to review independent and small distribution titles and have been quite excited to see how high the quality of so many indie productions have become. Indeed some of the truly impressive DVDs have come from independent and non mainstream directors and distributors.

We have been especially interested in the development of our magazine reviews covering all sorts of fascinating magazines. These cover everything from comics to art, cult to underground, music to cinema magazine and of course, we review everything from the fiercely independent zine to the mainstream cinema magazine.

Early in the year we added a high quality paperback edition called "Synergy Compendium" which added another level to our distribution. Happily, we found our readers liked this new development as it offered a library of reviews of unusual products as well as in

depth articles which could be referred back to on a regular basis. These are presented in a colour format in a high quality bound paperbacks.

Midyear, we decided to expand the Synergy Compendium model by making them available *free of charge* from our website and wow, what a response !

We are now able to include far highly quality photographs, screen shots, images and posters as well as expanded reviews all in a relatively reasonable download size, especially considering the speed of even the most basic broadband connection.

At the same time we have keep a simple white and background avoiding what we see as a pitfall of digital publishing i.e. using too many background colours so downloads end up bit unwieldy and the magazine hard to read. The key should always be user friendly and it is too easy to try and duplicate a print printed magazine in a digital format and produce something which cannot easily be used and enjoyed. Our approach has been to design the print edition as a paperback reference book and the digital edition much the same. Clear, easy to read, simple fonts but also with lots of photos, screenshots, images and colour.

This new model of daily site updating, a digital and print edition will continue as our new mode of publishing. It seems to work well and "covers all bases" .

By giving our readers choices it means everyone is happy, we have also found by allowing individual printing and distribution for non commercial use that the Compendiums are reaching extra readers.

We hope you enjoy this issue and 2009 should be even better !

**Editorial Team**  
**Synergy Magazine**





# REGIONS

Synergy Reviews DVDs from all regions.

The R descriptor with each DVD covers the Region.

1 = USA  
2 = UK  
3 = Asia  
4 = Australia  
0 = All region.

Blu Ray:  
We only review All Region and Region B titles.

The best reference site for Blu Ray is [blu-ray.com](http://www.blu-ray.com), it includes lots of details about Blu Ray releases and is one of the only reliable sources for information on which Blu Ray releases are ALL REGION.

**Web:** <http://www.blu-ray.com>

While we review the DVD that has been supplied to us (from whatever region), there may be other editions of the film. These may vary in content and quality from what we have described.

Since we are a genre based magazine, the range of titles reviewed will always come from all around the globe.

For international films from the US there are many suppliers including [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).

For international films from the UK there are many suppliers including [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk).

For rare Asian titles we recommend Asian Cult DVD (<http://asiancult.com>)

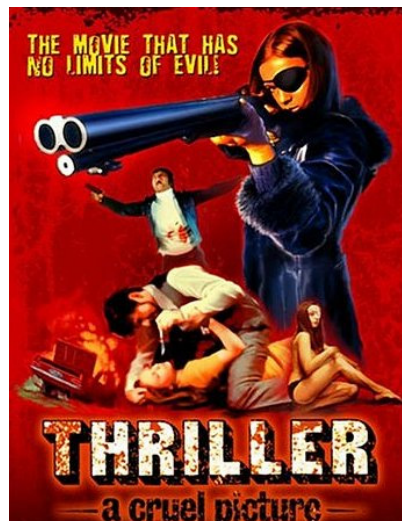
For other rare titles we recommend Diabolik DVD (<http://www.diabolikdvd.com>).

There are a wide variety of retail outlets in Australia including Ezydvd (<http://www.ezydvd.com.au>)

# REVIEWERS

Synergy has a range of staff reviewers—we also have a number of freelance reviewers who regularly supply us reviews.

Reviews by freelance reviewers are marked with the reviewer names. We do not list names with general staff reviews, features and articles. Our primary freelance reviewers are Bob Estreich & Michelle Taylor.



# COPYRIGHT

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**SYNERGY MAGAZINE**  
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**Australia**

<http://www.synergy-magazine.com>

Synergy Compendiums are published as extensions to the website and includes all the reviews from the website from the preceding 2-3 months with extra materials, extended reviews, added images, screen shorts and special competitions.

## Digital Edition Special Conditions

The Digital Edition can be downloaded free. It can be printed for personal use only (no commercial use). Distribution by individuals for non commercial use is permitted, indeed encouraged. However, Synergy cannot be reproduced or distributed commercially with express written permission.

The Digital Edition cannot be altered or articles used without permission, except for small segments for criticism or review as copyright allows.

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The movie posters used are within the public domain.

# NEWS IN BRIEF



## Dead Books

Web: <http://deadbooks.com/>

Deadbooks.com is a massive, Hyper-Serialization of Hasso Wuerslin's SF-Horror series, The DeadBooks.

Spanning 150 chapters, involving 100 actors, and the cutting-edge sounds of musical artists worldwide, Deadbooks.com is a revolutionary mash-up of story-telling techniques.

## Cloven Path Ministries

*Jesus Saves,  
but Satan Pays  
Interest.*



Web: <http://www.cp-ministries.com>

Great fun website with awesome leaflets, movies and a wicked sense of humour.

## Steve Ray Vaughn 1:3 Scale Replica Guitar

The producers of the finest quality limited-edition replicas in the world develop spitting image of the legendary axeman's signature tool



Winder, GA - With his astonishingly accomplished guitar playing, Stevie Ray Vaughan ignited the blues revival of the 80s. Drawing from a wealth of influences like Albert King, Otis Rush, and Muddy Waters, Stevie incorporated players like Jimi Hendrix and Lonnie Mack to develop a uniquely eclectic and fiery style that has inspired countless aspiring guitarists. Stevie Ray was the leading beacon of light in American blues, consistently performing for sell-out crowds and earning four Grammy Awards.

In tribute to the inspiring musicianship and indelible legacy of Stevie Ray Vaughan, GMP Diecast is pleased to announce the release of Stevie Ray's most recognizable guitar #1. This officially licensed, 1:3-scale Fender guitar replica features a real wood neck contoured to match the real guitar, an accurately contoured die-cast body, moveable pickup selector switch, volume and tone controls, real steel strings, and a moveable tremolo arm. Vivid colors and wood grain details make this replica a must-have for any guitar enthusiast.

It comes with a display stand, wall mount, and full-color collector's box.

The worldwide release of this remarkable Stevie Ray Vaughan replica will be limited to 1000 serialized units. It is certain to sell out quickly so customers should reserve theirs today.

Web: <http://www.gmpdiecast.com>

## Morbid: A Love Story

Christian (Liam Smith) is a typical college student besides the fact that he is a serial killer. He sees death as the greatest art form, ranking his targets by degree of difficulty and making his victims his easel. Christian takes a liking to Belle (Anna Palestis) a girl in his class and falls in love.



He decides he wants to lead a normal life and stop his killing ways, but old habits die hard. Meanwhile, F.B.I. agent Jack Stevenson (Chris Vanderhorst) who was assigned to Christian's case three years earlier has grown distant to his family due to the demands of the case. He feels guilty when his family dies in car accident caused by a man falling asleep at the wheel. Jack feels the man deserves to die and battles fantasies of murdering the man himself as a way to make amends with his loved ones.

When he finally tracks down Christian, he has a new plan. Although there is plenty of blood and gore, the film is different from a typical run of the mill slasher film because the serial killer is the protagonist. The role of hero and villain change throughout the film, making the viewer question right, wrong and his or her own morality. The film's overall message is that love heals even the deepest scars and makes you question whether doing bad things for the right reasons is justifiable.

Morbid: A Love story will run the film festival circuit in late 2008 and will be released on DVD nationally and worldwide in 2009.

Web: (Myspace Page)

<http://profile.myspace.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=user.viewprofile&friendid=402987870>



## Blood De Madam: The Fallen Ones

Web: <http://www.myspace.com/bdmtrilogy>

Blood De Madam is aimed to take horror back to where it began. Too many horror films these days seem to be aimed at the teen audience and end up with a PG 13 rating, not with Blood De Madam. It is inspired by a true story of a mass murder that claimed the lives of over 170 men, women and children and is filmed and produced in the style which was common in the great days of horror in the 70s and 80s i.e. packed with gore, sex and lots of taboo breaking scenes.

The film is a middle film of a trilogy written by Keith P Stoddard and will be directed by the Godfather of Gore H.G. Lewis. It should be a very wild ride ! All the cast working on the film are focused on taking that extra step to bring back true Horror and many of them are the cult legends of the genre. On board for the ride is the special effects brilliance of Tom Devlin of 1313fx, the great talent of DP Caleb Emerson, and the person who will take on the score of the films as well as star of the film - the talented Sean Gordon

Blood De Madam: The Fallen Ones will lift the veil as it brings back the true essence of fear. It chisels at the paranoia we all feel about those around us. Do we really know our neighbours ? Who is that man walking in front of my home ? Are we really alone ? Stoddard wants to take these feelings of fear and entwine them to create a horror film that dares to step over the line.

The plot of the tales is that five friends decide to travel to the site of the murders which claimed the lives of 170 people back in 1982. Their intention is to shoot a documentary but what they discover is some secrets are better left buried. They are stalked and very brutally tortured and killed. The film will not hold back on the gore and bring you directly in confrontation with the darkness inside yourself.



## The ESP Affair

Point Reyes Pictures and JLP in Northern California's beautiful San Francisco Bay Area, have teamed to produce their first joint feature film: "The ESP Affair;" a paranormal thriller about an ordinary woman who uncovers her dormant psychic ability to "remote view" - and stumbles upon a national government involving mind control against an unsuspecting populous. In the spirit of "The X-Files," "The ESP Affair" transcends its genre.



"The ESP Affair" was co-written by producer Murray Suid and director Jordan Livingston, and features an all-star team of veteran filmmakers at the helm, including Executive Producer Scott Rosenfelt ("Home Alone") and Oscar-Winning Sound Designer Chris Boyes ("Pirates of the Caribbean" Trilogy), among others.

Connie Morris is an elementary school teacher with an unhappy marriage and a penchant for romance novels. When a nightly series of intense dream fantasies unexplainably implicate Connie in adultery, Connie's waking life begins to unravel. As mysterious precognitive visions and hallucinations plague her days, Connie is forced to question her own sanity. But the connection between Connie's dreams and waking nightmares soon reveals itself, as Connie stumbles upon a national government conspiracy involving ESP and mind control. Risking everything to stop an insidious coup and regain control of her own life, Connie discovers the potential of her own extraordinary psychic powers, hidden dormant inside her.

Nearly 100 psychics and remote viewers participated in the Psychic Audition challenge run by the directors, which involved trying to describe the contents of four secret images located in The ESP Affair production office. Impartial judges identified six of the entrants as demonstrating notable remote viewing talent. These six semi-finalists are Ankhasha Amenti, Kevin Baldwin, James Rand, Gerald Senehi, Cherise Rivera and Donna Wright.

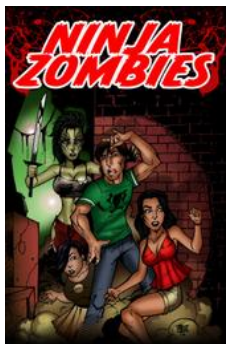
The above individuals have been invited to participate in one more trial, which will involve making their own drawings of objects or places chosen in secrecy by The ESP Affair producers.

The final round of the Psychic Audition will take place this coming winter. The person scoring highest will play a role in The ESP Affair. Stay tuned to [www.ESPAffair.com](http://www.ESPAffair.com) for more information as it develops!

# NINJA ZOMBIES

A director and author combine forces to bring comic book pages that “come to life”

Movies made from popular comic books are a winning device in Hollywood. To that point, this summer alone both “Iron Man” and “The Dark Knight” have been huge critical and box office successes. That truth in Hollywood has a corollary that goes: in movie-town nobody reads, meaning screenplays.



“Producers don’t even want to read comics anymore,” says writer/director Steve Kahn. He should know. His mentor is Stephen Stern, author of “War of the Worlds” and “Beowulf” graphic novels, which were released alongside the Steven Spielberg and Robert Zemeckis films of the same names.

Kahn saw firsthand the brick wall they were up against while the two were busy adapting his feature screenplay into graphic novel format. But, that’s when he got his “blinding flash of light” as he calls it (comic book guys aren’t known for their subtlety). “We’ll make the comic book pages come to life!”

Two of Stern’s comic book pages adapted from Kahn’s feature screenplay *Ninja Zombies* evolved into a full multimedia pitch presentation ([www.ninjazombiesmovie.com](http://www.ninjazombiesmovie.com)). “We didn’t have to publish an entire graphic novel,” says a beaming Kahn, explaining they got the entire flavor of his story with live action footage that morphs into comic strip then music video.

The comic strip characters, drawn by Bill Maus, serve as “colorful iconic elements that grab your at-



tention quickly and in a way that video or a script never could.”

So is it working? “It’s all about telling your story as quickly and easily,” says Kahn. “With comic strip, live action footage and music video we found our knockout Karate chop!”

*Holy hyperbole, Batman.*

*Ninja Zombies* is a feature film and graphic novel in the vein of “Shaun of the Dead” and is currently being courted by several production companies.

Visit [www.ninjazombiesmovie.com](http://www.ninjazombiesmovie.com) for lots of details about the comic, film, great galleries, synopsis and background info. There are some really nice sections in the comics where you can read the standard comic and then click and bring it alive as the movie !

This is an upcoming film with a lot going for it, it has a strong independent style matched with a creative and innovative approach which is going to take it places.

This is one to keep an eye on !



## New Website Offers Global Distribution Outlet and Profit Sharing for Independent Filmmakers

Indieroad.net is a new website providing independent filmmakers with an unprecedented opportunity to gain worldwide exposure and profit-sharing. Created by a team of veteran entertainment and business executives, Indieroad.net addresses the lack of robust distribution options available to promising new talent in the independent film field.

Indieroad.net is the brainchild of former Warner Brothers executive Vince Di Pierro who teamed with marketing veteran Joe Cirillo in creating the ground breaking website.

“In a business where it is very difficult for gifted film-



makers to reach a public audience, the site will provide a channel for fresh new talent that deserves to be recognized by connecting them to fans, industry leaders, and film festivals around the world," said Di Pierro, Creative Advisor. A frequent judge at film festivals and Chair of the Advisory Board for the Arizona International Film Festival, Di Pierro has seen numerous quality indie films languish through inefficient distribution.

Unlike many web portals, which post any content provided, Indieroad.net will only use content from talented filmmakers. Material is reviewed and chosen by a panel of experts on the Indieroad.net film screening team. In addition to the priceless chance to market their films, the participating independent filmmakers will also receive a guaranteed percentage of revenue from films, music and advertising sales. Also, in 2009, Indieroad.net will act as a major sponsor for the Slamdance Film Festival-- furthering its goal to create opportunity for filmmakers around the world.

Visitors to the site who wish to watch the films can stream or download them for as low as eighty cents per film. Additionally, original soundtrack music can be downloaded for fifty cents per song.

To experience Indieroad.net online film viewing at no cost, site visitors can access "Discover Shorts," a free short film program playing every Saturday, and a Filmmaker Showcase that provides previews, detailed filmmakers bios, and interviews.

"By offering a guaranteed percentage of revenue from films, music and advertising sales, Indieroad.net promises to be groundbreaking in the independent film world," states Joe Cirillo, Director of Marketing at Indieroad.net. "We aim to really get the talent out there and seen."

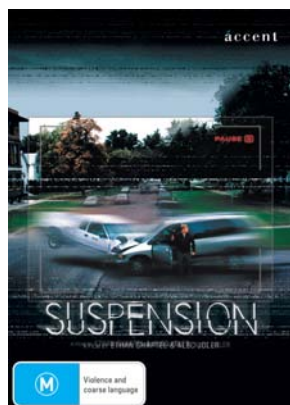
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## Suspension News !!

Last issue we gave the film Suspension a rave review and discussed how it was an astounding first film from the filmmaker involved.

We have some great news in regards to Australian distribution. Suspension is being released in Australia by Accent Films as both a rental release in November (2008) and a sell through edition in February 2009.

If you were unable to get your hands on the US release, well now you have no excuse whatsoever !



## Terror Overload Tales from Satan's Truck Stop

Terror Overload – Tales from Satan's Truck Stop is a smorgasbord of current indie horror veterans all rolled up into one completely insane exploitation horror anthology that will need to be seen to be believed!



In the wrap around story called "Devil Driver", a creepy truck driver tells a trilogy of terrifying tales to a sexy stranded hitchhiker that include "Dinner Date", "Lot Lizard" and "Mongo Chupa"! She has no idea what this ride has in store for her or does she?

Helming Terror Overload is a group of Minnesota based filmmakers including Producer and Director Jason Stephenson (Pajama Party Massacre, along with first time Producer Directors Kevin Myhre (who did FX on Pajama Party Massacre and Doomed to Consume) and Brant Johnson as well.

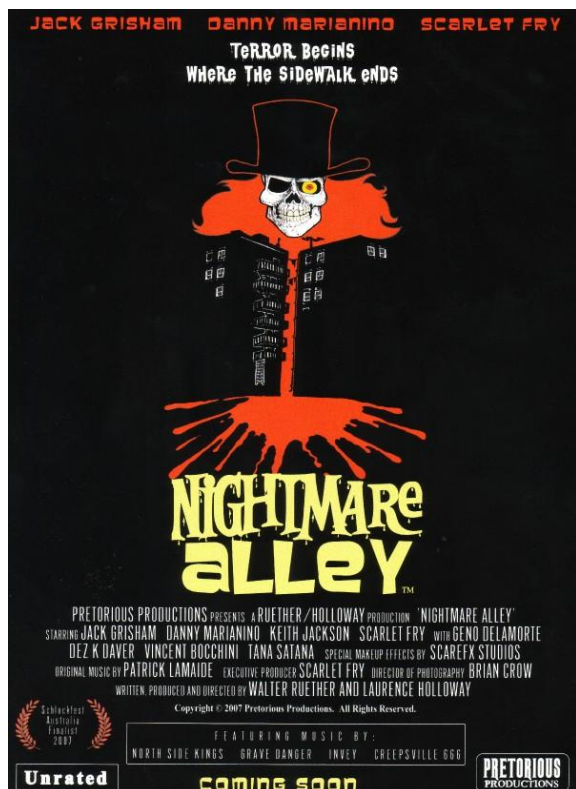
Terror Overload features an eclectic group of cast members including such people as horror author Joe Knetter (Pajama Party Massacre, Doomed to Consume) who pulls double duty as writer and actor, Jason's Ari Lehman (Friday 13th, ThanXgiving) sultry scream queens Scarlet Salem (Tales of the Dead, Pajama Party Massacre), Rachel Grubb (13 Hours in a Warehouse), model/actress Nicole (Nikki Homicide) Kruex, bodybuilder Marv Blauvelt (Beef, Sculpture), Chase Ambrose (Cutting Room), Landyn Banx (Tales of the Dead), former pro wrestler Mike (Gator McGraw) Kinney and first timers John "Bud" Knetter and Leah Avery. Writing duties were handled by Joe Knetter, Dustin LaValley and Robbie Ribspreader, all of which I've worked with on past projects. In the Make-up and FX department... Kevin Myhre did everything for the segments "Dinner Date" and "Lot Lizard" and Tim & Lisa over at Haunted Autumn Productions took care of everything in "Mongo Chupa"!

Three of the four segments have been completed and a shooting schedule for the final wrap around story "Devil Driver" is set for the tail end of September!

From what we have seen, genre fans that love their ultra-low-budget exploitation horror flicks loaded with over the top blood, boobs, gore, sex, creatures, sleaze and a bunch of other crazy stuff will not be disappointed with Terror Overload!

## For More Information Visit

<http://www.terroroverload.com>  
[http://www.myspace.com/terror\\_overload](http://www.myspace.com/terror_overload)



### Scarlet Fry's Nightmare Alley

Web: <http://www.myspace.com/pretoriusprod>

Scarlet Fry's Nightmare Alley is a campy splatterfest anthology in the vein of Tales from the Crypt and Toxic Avenger that pays homage to 60's Grindhouse and horror films. It will hit theatres in January 2009.

The film was written by Walter Ruether and Laurence Holloway.

"Its like Blood Feast meets pink flamingos" comments films Producer/Director Walter Ruether. "It provides a debut for a lot of young new talent in very funny roles".

Ruether will make his third appearance as Scarlet fry the movies ghoulish host. The Movie will also debut Geno Dellamorte and Dez K. Daver, members of the popular psychobilly band Creepsville666. Also in the cast will be Tana Satana, Vincent Bochinni and hard-core group North Side Kings front man Danny Marianino who is infamous and gained notoriety for knocking out Glenn Danzig (formerly of the Misfits) with one punch. Marianino has also appeared in several other genre films such as Death Factory 2 (Bloodletting). Also appearing in Nightmare Alley will be Jack Grisham lead vocalist for the legendary punk band TSOL. Grisham recently appeared in American Hardcore (A history of American Punk 1980-85)

TSOL also appeared on the soundtrack for the original Return of the living Dead. Nightmare alley was filmed all over Arizona and Los Angeles 2007-2008.

The film is a story about Grisham, a homeless man who makes an alley his home.



One day he discovers some punk rocker kids invading his territory and approaches them with a comic book titled "Nightmare Alley" and trades it with one of them for a smoke, little do the kids know that gruesome death is to be revealed in the pages.

Scarlet fry then appears to offer you seven Twisted tales from the comic that will turn your stomach and send you screaming for your mother !

The soundtrack to Nightmare alley is also going to include several up and coming Bands and Musicians such as Grave Danger, Creepsville666, North Side Kings and Patrick Lamaide who will do the film score. This film is a perfect medium for Indie Music to reach a wide and diverse audience.

Nightmare Alley was an attempt to create a film that was purely entertainment with lots of gore. Inspired by Herschel Gordon Lewis, Ted Mykels and Ray Dennis Steckler

"Its an absurd comedy says Ruether "If your looking for meaning look elsewhere!"

### New Hammer Film: The Wake Wood !

Embarking on its first feature film production in nearly 30 years, legendary British film company Hammer Films has started principle photography in Ireland on the horror thriller "The Wake Wood" with a cast that includes Aidan Gillen ("The Wire"), Eva Birthistle ("Middletown") and Timothy Spall ("Harry Potter" series, "Sweeney Todd").

Recognized as one of the preeminent horror brands in the world, the last horror film produced by Hammer Films was "To the Devil a Daughter" starring Christopher Lee in 1976. The last feature (horror or otherwise) produced by the company was the mystery thriller "The Lady Vanishes" in 1979.

David Keating is directing "The Wake Wood" from a screenplay he co-wrote with Brendan McCarthy, who came up with the original story. Brendan McCarthy is producing the film along with John McDonnell through their Fantastic Films banner. Simon Oakes and Guy East are Executive Producers.



## House of Flesh Mannequins

House of Flesh Mannequins is a sad and twisted love story between a 40-year-old photographer named Sebastian and young girl named Sarah, whom Sebastian meets on the day of her 18th birthday. Sarah, an aspiring writer, lives with her blind father in an apartment that they rent from Sebastian.

She is fascinated by her landlord while her father loathes the weird and mysterious photographer. Sebastian lives in a parallel reality as he is forced to confront the traumatizing events of his past. As a child who was abused in name of the medical research, Sebastian is haunted by terrifying visions and nightmares melded with the real life events.

Eventually, Sebastian loses the ability to distinguish his lucid nightmares from reality. What does he contemplate doing in the privacy of his own room every night? What kind of film does he have a deep yearning to watch? The only audience he will have one night is that of Sarah's father. However, the blind man cannot comprehend the heinous suffering that we as viewers are able to see.

Sarah is suspicious and starts investigating further into the life of Sebastian, but the events that transpire are not at all what she had in mind... We live in the time of TV, where we as viewers are slaves to this magic box. Many of us hate it, and yet most of us cannot live without it...while still some will kill to be in it... Who is the hunter and who is the hunted?

The film is driven by great actors in a truly unforgettable story where nothing and no one is really what it seems. This is the first world reality movie! The Sex and Violence are real. International porn stars and regular actors working together for the first time with extreme body art performers used in the torture scenes. Everything is real, but at the same time, everything is done for the purpose of creating a movie, which is anything but real.

The movie presents a compelling case against the use of gratuitous violence on TV as well as the self-righteous, sanctimonious ways that society chooses to confront children's issues. It is a highly artistic and psychological exploration that juxtaposes the psychological trauma of an artist and the horrific work



that it yields as a result of such abominable acts of torture.

The cast of House of Flesh Mannequins includes Irena A. Hoffman, Giovanni Lombardo Radice (John Morghen), Domiziano Arcangeli and Randal Malone. Irena Hoffman received the best actress at "The festival of Malaga" with Cristophe Lambert in "Metamorphosis". She accepted this new role which is full of nudity and weirdness as a new way to explore herself through a extreme character.

G. Lombardo Radice is a Italian International horror icon and has starred in many movies by Fulci, Lenzi, Deodato, Soavi and has many prestigious fans including Quentin Tarantino.

As special guest the international beautiful pornstar Roberta Gemma will for the first time appear in a horror movie in a dramatic role.

The movie is almost finished and ready to be distribute, but has suffered from delays caused by censorship and complaints about obscenity, blasphemy and extreme violence.

The choice of extreme language, graphic content and violence and sex was not undertaken as for voyeuristic purposes, but to offer a comparison between the movie and the violence and sex that the TV culture exposes us to on a daily basis.

For a trailer, images and synopsis visit the Flesh Mannequins Website.

**Web:** <http://www.fleshmannequins.com>



# FILMAKER'S TV

**Web:** <http://www.filmakers.tv>

Beginning October 15th 2008, Filmmakers' TV, the first web-TV totally dedicated to independent cinema, will broadcast in streaming, everyday 24/7, feature films, short films, TV series and television broadcasts such as Sit-com and TV news programs on weekly schedule.

The films are also available at any time through the "on-demand movies" page on the site. There's only one rule: the movies must have a narrative intent and be strictly independent.

Designed by Daniele Favilli, author and actor in film and television, along with director Nello Ferrara and web-designer Andrea Palomba, Filmmakers' TV is also a community where to exchange tips, find news and exploit new opportunities.

From now on the independent cinema has an ultimate place, and obviously it's free!

The services for film-makers are in fact completely free as well as the access to the web-TV and movies on demand for the audience.

All movies have to be subtitled in English for international viewing...

## Daniele Favilli (Daniel Sparks).

Daniele Favilli a.k.a. Daniel Sparks, eclectic Italian actor, is known in Italy especially for his participation in the television drama "Un Posto al Sole" (A place in the sun) and in the meantime is building up a solid international career in theatre, cinema and television.



In February 2008, Daniele moved to Los Angeles and was hired for a co-star role in the movie "TIC", a "Snatch/Pulp fiction-Style" film from director Keith Parmer. Daniele plays the role of Sal, a hot-headed, evil, weird character, alongside with major Hollywood actors such as Treva Etienne (Pirates of the Caribbean, Black Hawk Down, Criminal Minds) and Lennie James (Snatch).

The first screening of the film will take place Nov. 17th at the Black Film-Makers Film Festival in London. After the event, Daniele will return to Hollywood to begin filming a new movie: "Whacked".

In November 2008, two new movies where Daniele stars will be released in Italy. Daniele is protagonist with the famous actor Luigi Diberti in the horror-philosophical movie "Il Cadavere di Vetro" (The Glass Corpse) by Massimiliano Palaia and "Bingo" by Francesco Ciccone.

Originally from Florence, Daniele Favilli filed the format of a new television series that blends art, mystery and thriller atmospheres, "Golconda" which draws inspiration from the richness and beauty of Italian Art.





# COMPETITIONS

## ZOMBIE LOVE ! GIVEAWAY

Zombie Love is a great short musical / film (reviewed in this issue) and we are lucky enough to have a copy to giveaway !

The DVD is great edition including some extras such as deleted scenes, outtakes, behind the scenes and more.

Sadly, it not available directly in Australia but it is certainly worth getting online from [www.zombielovethemovie.com](http://www.zombielovethemovie.com)

Better still, see if you can win a copy! Send an email to [promotions@synergy-magazine.com](mailto:promotions@synergy-magazine.com) with "Zombie Love" in the subject.



## INSOMNIA GIVEAWAY

Competition Ends 31st October

The Insomnia range includes titles The Descent, Altered, The Hitcher, Severance, Shadow Puppets and Dark Ride. We have 3 Sets to giveaway - Each with 1 of the six Insomnia edition DVDS.

Email: [promotions@synergy-magazine.com](mailto:promotions@synergy-magazine.com)

with "Halloween Insomnia" in the subject line, make sure you include your full name, email and mailing address in the email.

## ZOMBIE HEAD GIVEAWAY

We have three Zombie Heads to giveaway.

Email: [promotions@synergy-magazine.com](mailto:promotions@synergy-magazine.com)

Send an email with "Zombie Heads" in the subject line, make sure you include your full name, email and mailing address in the email.

See reviews later in this issue !

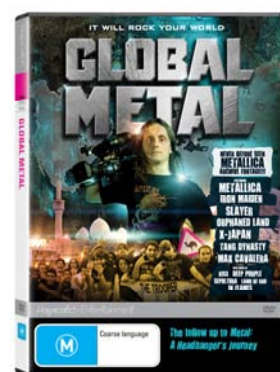


## GLOBAL METAL GIVEAWAY

Competition Ends 31st November

We have four copies of GLOBAL METAL from Hopscotch films to giveaway,

Send an email to the below address with "Global Metal" in the subject line, make sure you include your full name, email and mailing address in the email.



Email: [promotions@synergy-magazine.com](mailto:promotions@synergy-magazine.com)

## SERIAL KILLER WATCHES GIVEAWAY !

Competition Ends 31st November

The ultimate in collectible bad taste—beautifully made, leather bands with the Killer logo and killer on the faceplate !

We have three watches to giveaway:

Charles Manson, Ted Bundy and Ed Gein.

Send an email to the below address with "SK Watches" in the subject line, make sure you include your full name, email and mailing address in the email.

Email: [promotions@synergy-magazine.com](mailto:promotions@synergy-magazine.com)



# OZPLOITATION!

To celebrate the revival of Ozploitation with the amazing world shattering success of Not Quite Hollywood, Umbrella Entertainment is releasing two sets of mind shattering Aussie cult classics. These are epitome of what has become known as Aussie Exploitation or Ozploitation.

These sets have six DVDs in each and will form a veritable library of exploitation, horror, cult and more.

They are beautifully produced in box sets and offer some of the more significant Ozploitation films of the period from sex to horror, biker films to giant pigs, atomic horror to films that just have to be seen to be believed !!!

## Ozploitation Volume 1 Umbrella Ent.

6 DVD set including the over the top Turkey Shoot, Road Games, Night of Fear, Harlequin, the adventure of Barry McKenzie and the Naked Bunyip.



## Ozploitation Volume 2 Umbrella Ent.

6 DVD set including Razorback, the classic Stone, Chain Reaction and Long Weekend, Fantasm and the true story of Eskimo Nell.



We have one set of each to giveaway.

Send an email with "Ozplot Me" in the subject line, make sure you include your full name, email and mailing address in the email.

Email: [promotions@synergy-magazine.com](mailto:promotions@synergy-magazine.com)



## LETS GET SURREAL GIVEAWAY

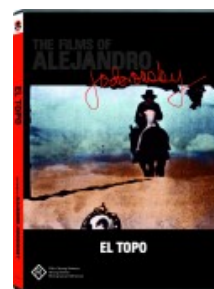
### TWO AMAZING TITLES FROM SIREN VISUAL

Alejandro Jodorowsky is considered the father of modern underground and surreal cinema. Holy Mountains created a scandal at the 1973 Cannes Film Festival with a flood of sacrilegious imagery and existential symbolism is a spiritual quest for enlightenment pitting illusion against truth. It still packs a punch today.

For many years El Topo and Holy Mountain were not available on DVD and at last they have not only been released in definitive high quality editions but are available in Australia !

### El Topo

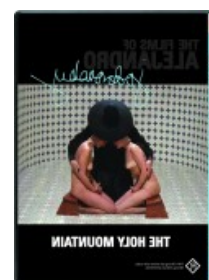
Send an email with "El Topo" in the subject line, make sure you include your full name, email and mailing address in the email.



Email: [promotions@synergy-magazine.com](mailto:promotions@synergy-magazine.com)

### Holy Mountain

Send an email with "Holy Mountain" in the subject line, make sure you include your full name, email and mailing address in the email.



A special thanks to the various companies providing giveaway products !



# Not Quite Hollywood

**Madman Entertainment**

**Released theatrically August 28th 2008**

**Web:** <http://www.notquitehollywood.com.au>

Not Quite Hollywood is the ultimate guilty pleasure, it is the most fun I have watching a movie in the last year and I watch lots of films. It is a rip roaring roller coaster ride through the low brow world of Ozploitation, the world of Australian genre cinema.

This is a super fast paced doco made by Mark Hartley which is not only a homage to cult cinema but to Hartley's superb direction and editing style. He utilizes a library of rare footage to produce an unforgettable experience.

It is a doco which has the punch and style of an action film - filled to the brim with movie clips, action shots, nudity, explosions, violence, more nudity, interviews, kung fu and more nudity - it is an orgiastic banquet of 70s and 80s films.



There are just so many cult classics which have been long forgotten which are now discussed in this truly affectionate yet irrelevant celebration. You leave the film savouring all the different flavours and wishing for more.

Australian genre films are those we may so often remember but pretend not to. While the art and period epics of Australian cinema were heralded as great masterpieces, these were the films that were lambasted by the critics but adored by the public and loved at the late night sessions of the local drive in.

They were reviled in the press, debated in the parliament, threatened by the censors and yet loved by both the counter culture and the movie going public.

They were the films that people flocked to in droves while the puritans denounced them as bringing about the fall of Western Civilization. Well, Western Civilization did not fall and while the wowsers still wail, the genre film is still here and still being fondly remembered and luckily, now are experiencing a bit of a renaissance.



Ranging from sex romps such as Alvin Purple and Stork to the crass humour of Barry Mackenzie and his first technicolour yawn on screen. From the action classics such as Mad Max and the Man from Kong Kong to offensive splatter classics such as Turkey Shoot, they are all here, remembered in their wild abandon and show in all their midnight glory.

It would be hard to list all the films covered but some include Patrick, Thirst, Turkey Shoot, Stone, BMX Bandits, The Long Weekend, Mad Max, Fantasm, Howling III: The Marsupials, Mad Dog Morgan, Barry MacKenzie, Stork, Number 96 and lots and lots more. The director clearly has an encyclopaedic knowledge of Australia genre cinema of all sorts—biker, action, sex, cult, horror, comedy, splatter and exploitation.

Interspersed throughout this journey into the underbelly of cinema is a wide range of interviews ranging from such lovers of the medium as Quentin Tarantino, Richard Franklin, Dennis Hopper, Barry Humphries and George Miller to its staunchest critics in the like of Bob Ellis and Phillip Adams. Quentin Tarantino is especially memorable with his colourful dialogue, offhand comments and obvious adoration for the genre.

There are lots of wild gossip, rumours, juicy titbits and memories as well as stories which were probably best not told “out of school”, but lovely to hear anyway ! I loved the tales of Dennis Hopper and his out of control behavior on the set of Mad Dog Morgan and the dangerous stunts performed for such films as Mad Max and other road movies.

At times it is like listening to a bunch of old friends reminiscing, so many of the interviews have a personal and conversational tone which invite us into the dialogue and make us part of the story.

Not Quite Hollywood has a marvelous direct quality as well as the enthusiasm of a director who is obviously a true film obsessive.

At the same time it is not all puff and ego stroking, there are lots of honest moments and blunt reflections on the dangers of “gonzo” filmmaking in a period when safety regulations were not existent and pretty well anything was fair game. It seems this was



the period when actors and stunt men alike would take any risks necessary for their craft and many certainly paid for it in injuries from broken bones to burns and sometimes worse.

It is intelligent filmmaking, allowing the movies, memorabilia and film clips coupled with interviews tell the story, there is no overriding critical judgment, and thank god, no unnecessary film criticism.

These were films made to shock the conservative cobwebs out of the psyche of a narrow Australia and they successes admirably. Many were great successes, others were dismal failures.

Sadly so many now are relegated to the selves of film archives and have never seen the light of day, even the most basic DVD release.

This is an enthusiastic film which gets the motor running, it is excitable, energetic and infectious.





There is also a serious side to Not Quite Hollywood as it explores the censorship row that occurred during the 70s and 80s which still raises its ugly head today in 2008.

There is also a serious side to Not Quite Hollywood as it explores the censorship row that occurred during the 70s and 80s and which still raises its ugly head today in 2008. Filmmakers during that period were constantly butting heads against the censors and too often their films were cut to pieces for mainstream and international release. In some cases we have only been able to see the full uncut editions of these classics in recently released DVD editions.

You would think that in the 21st century the government would believe adults would be mature enough to decide what they wish to watch in the privacy in their own home, but not so. The Wowzers such as Fred Nile (as shown in the film) are still poking their noses into our privates now and many of the observations by Barry Humphries on the then chief censor of Australian films could equally still apply today.

Indeed, over the last few years the hand of censorship has increased with many mainstream films being more sternly classified and scenes clipped and removed for ridiculous reason. It seems that those who control our government lack not only an artistic sense, but any sense of style or humour. When you read some of the reasons behind some of the cuts demands on films you begin to wonder why religious paternalism should have any place in a secular multicultural democracy in the 21st century.

Not quite Hollywood reminds you of just how daring Australian film was in the 70s and 80s and also holds out hope for a return to such genre glory again, especially with the success of such films as Wolf Creek, Saw and Rogue.

The moment it finished I began rummaging through the internet to look for DVD releases of these old classics.

While sadly many could not be found, I located many of them and will start my journey down memory lane tomorrow night !

## Turkey Shoot Umbrella R4 DVD

Turkey Shoot is the epitome of Ozploitation cinema, directed by infamous director Brian Trenchard-Smith, it is a totally over the top cult classic. It is generally seen as one of the first Australian films to attempt to tap into the success of the Mad Max films. With a strongly futuristic tone influenced by the post Apocalyptic science fiction of the period with lashings of the Most Dangerous Game (1932).



While these serious concepts may underlie the film and its portrayal of a totalitarian re-education camp has quite significant cinematic heritage, Turkey Shoot turns the whole genre into high camp with incredible over acting, extreme violence and political incorrectness.

It is 1995 and the way in which society deals with its non-conforming members is to send them to re-education camps. These work camps use a variety of methods, violent and otherwise, to break and reform their prisoners. A small group of new prisoners arrive for rehabilitation. Chris Walters, who had the misfortune to protest against the violence she saw by the police, Rita Daniels, who is accused of prostitution and Paul Landers, a radical who ran a pirate radio station.

The camp itself is run by a group of spoilt upper class debauchees who seem to take pleasure in the sadistic torture of the prisoners. Each year "Thatcher", the camps warden, offers the ultimate form of sporting entertainment for visiting officials, a turkey shoot. Each of the guests have their own weapons of choice and they choose a prisoner to hunt. Four prisoners are told that if they can evade their pursers for 24 hours they will have their freedom, but nothing is quite as it seems as the truth is that the camp is on an Island and there is no escape !



Turkey Shoot was notorious at the time for its lashings of violence, rape, gore and brutality. It's bizarre characters only added to the strange mix ranging from a stereotypical lesbian sexual predator in Carmen Duncan to a side-show freak who is the special friend of visiting hunter Tito and prison guards who are stupid as they come. It has some truly extreme moments including when Alf, Tito's offside, breaks off and eats the toe of the prisoner they are hunting! It revels in excess and uses as much gratuitous sex and violence as it can pack into its approximate 90 minutes.



Turkey Shoot still polarizes its audience; David Stratton once described it as 'a catalogue of sickening horrors' while Quentin Tarantino continues to sing its praises. In 2008 it is considered one of the ultimate Ozploitation titles !

The edition from Umbrella is truly stunning, a 16 x 9 high quality print with some superb documentaries including "Blood and Thunder Memories" – memories from such Turkey Shoot survivors (!) actors as Michael Craig, Lynda Stoner and Roger Ward and "A Good Soldier" – a comprehensive interview with director Brian Trenchard-Smith.

Turkey Shoot is available as a single DVD and will also be released as part of the Umbrella Ozploitation Box Set series in October.

### Razorback Umbrella R4 Collectors Edition

Razorback is a surprisingly impressive monster film set in outback Australia with the cinematography of an art film and the plot of a cult exploitation classic.



Directed by Russell Mulcahy, who up until this time was mainly known for his music videos and later went on to direct Highlander, Resident Evil Extinct and even episodes of the English edition of Queer as Folk, it has a sense of style not normally seen in cult films.

At the time it was derided for having style over substance, but I think this as uncharitable. The reality is that many films use style as a way to tell a story –

colour, shadow, imagery, symbols, sound – and a non linear approach to storytelling is common in Europe cinema particularly, Italian horror comes to mind.

Razorback has surprisingly impressive cinematography and is actually a rather moody and layered film, on DVD it is quite a visual feast. There are lots of memorable scenes, moody set pieces and even some nice dream sequences. There is a constant use of strange images ranging from crows to surreal night landscapes and symbolic images.

Certainly it is a strange amalgam of genres, it is Jaws in the outback with a giant pig (Razorback), a country inbred horror tale and meat eaters via animal liberationists. It seems to mix an art film sensibility with a cult genre film approach and this combination is unusual to say the least, but that just makes it more unique and more of Ozploitation classic !!

The film is packed with stereotypes and caricatures which have a dark humour about them, they are so extreme, so over the top that they are both shocking and amusing. Petpak is just so utterly repulsive you cannot believe it and yet it works. Having seen Razorback a few times, I see something more every time I watch it; I would really categorize it as a dark fantasy since so many elements seem to be a mixture of reality and perverse fantasy. The soundtrack by Iva Davies of Icehouse is excellent and creates a great atmosphere.

But, I should be honest, there are some problems and that major one is the Razorback ! It must be the worst mechanical animal ever created ! It looks terrible and as you will hear in the documentary it was literally a giant stuffed pig on wheels which could hardly be moved !

In addition, certainly some of the acting also leaves a little to be desired, I found Jake Cullen as the haunted grandfather wanting to avenge the death of his grandchild a bit wooden and unconvincing, but the others were reasonable.

The storyline is bizarre yet captivating. Jack Cullen is looking after his grandchild and without much warning, his house is torn apart by a large pig like creature and explodes. It seems the pig has taken away the child for a late night snack !

Nobody believes his story and he is put on trial in a local court for murder. While he is acquitted he becomes a pariah and so he begins a vendetta against the Razorback.

Cut to years later...

An American TV investigator comes to an outback town to document the killing of Kangaroos by Petpak to make cheap and nasty petfood.





She obviously makes enemies pretty quickly and when she decides to make a night time clandestine visit to Petpak she has overstepped the mark. Two rather perverse brothers, Benny and Dicko decide to rough her up, indeed Dicko wants to take it much further, but

before they can have their fun the razorback tears her and her car apart in a rather impressive and graphic scene.

Her husband travels to Australia to find his missing wife and the search for the pig begins. He befriends Benny and Dicko who rough him up leaving him wandering alone at night after a rather out of control roo shoot. When Cullen thinks he knows what happened to the missing animal liberationist, they leave him injured so the Razorback can kill him.

This leads, of course, to the final hunt and the one to one battle between the enraged husband and the mechanical pig !

The edition from Umbrella is a great 16.9 transfer and is beautifully clear with a 5.1 soundtrack, having originally seen this on video on its first release, it is marvellous to see such a high quality print. It really shows of the cinematography and the soundtrack by Iva Davies sounds awesome in DD5.1

Umbrella has not scrimped on the extras either, this release includes some great extras including Jaws on Trotters, a seventy minute documentary, an audio interview with Gregory Harrison, deleted scenes, a stills and poster gallery and more..

While Razorback is available is a single DVD release, it will also be included on the Ozploitation box sets released by Umbrella late October this year.

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### Snapshot Reviews of other Ozploitation Classics !

#### Night of Fear Umbrella Entertainment

A young woman (Carla Hoogeveen) drives away from her lover but is led off the road by means of a false road sign. This is a trap set by a sick and disturbed man (Norman Yemm) who lives alone with a colony of rats...

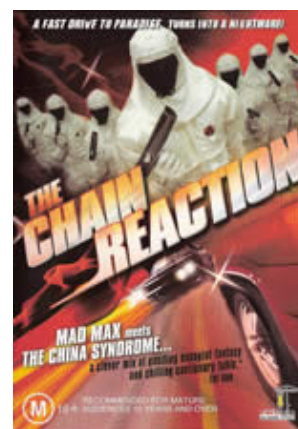


It was originally produced as a television pilot, for a proposed anthology series called Fright. However, this was the Seventies in Australia and there were lots of issues about horror, and it was rejected by the network, so it went to the Cinemas. It was actually originally banned in Australia but on appeal was given a R Rating, a new thing then ! It is also unusual in that it has no dialogue !

Today it is all relatively mild but the sex scenes and the inferred sexual violence still give it a M Rating and it is still an effective suspense film today.

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#### Chain Reaction Umbrella Entertainment



Chain Reaction is 1980 Australian cult classic directed by Ian Barry it tried to play of the post apocalyptic imagery which had brought about such success for Mad Max. A huge earthquake in rural Australia causes a dangerous leak at a nuclear waste storage facility. Heinrich Schmidt, an engineer badly injured in the accident wants to warn the public about the possible risk to the environment. Of course, his boss will have none of it and works to cover up the accident.

Heinrich escapes from the facility but since he is badly hurt and suffering from amnesia cannot get far. He is rescued by Larry and his wife. However, things are not going to be easy as his bosses henchman are on the way and he only has a short time to try and regain his memory.

This is a great Aussie cult classic, filled to the brim with action, suspense and explosions. It is fast paced and even has an earlier environmental message !

(Razorback, Turkey Shoot, Night of Fear and Chain Reaction are among the films which will be released in the Umbrella Ozploitation sets—they are also available as single titles)

# THE RAGE !

## ROBERT KURTZMAN'S LATEST ULTRA GOREFEST !

Screen Media Films

R1 DVD

Web: <http://www.theragefilm.com>

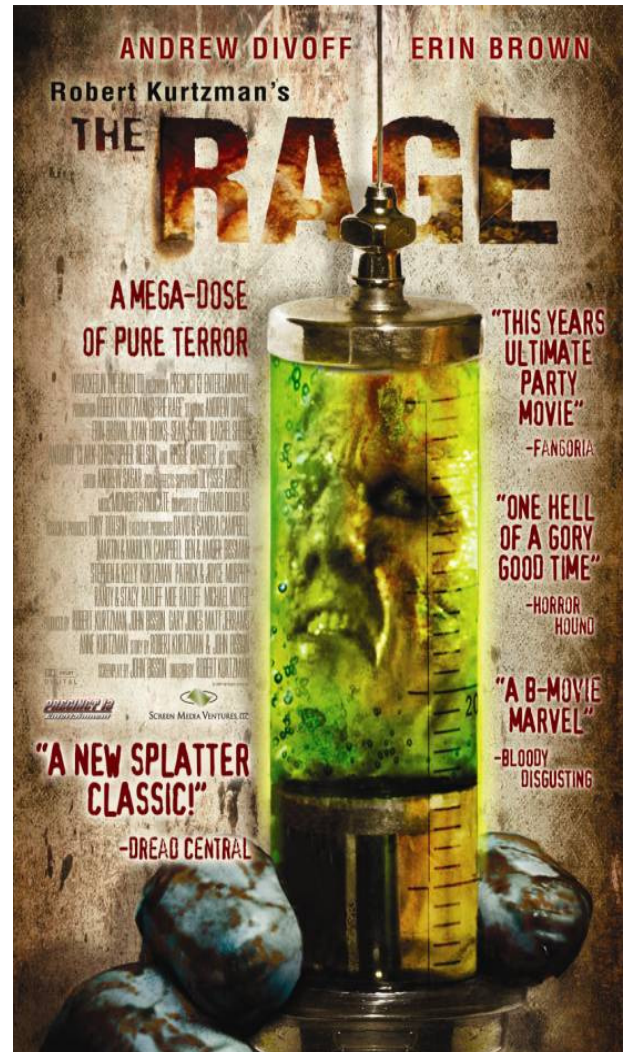
Robert Kurtzman was the creator of From Dusk Till Dawn and had has an illustrious career in special effects, working behind the scenes on such classics as Hostel, Cabin Fever, Evil Dead 2, Scream, The Devil's Rejects and too many other films to mention. Recently he formed his own company so he could have a more "hands on approach" to film direction and production and "The Rage" is his first major release.

The Rage is his return to the director's seat, bringing his unique visual style, mastery of special effects and lots of blood and gore. "The Rage" is based on a script from John Bisson and is marked by an interesting Science Fiction/ Horror storyline.

Andrew Divoff stars as Dr. Viktor Vasilenko, a former Russian scientist who has discovered the cure for cancer, but rather than been celebrated he is locked away. It seems that as his motherland changed hands from communism to democracy large multinational corporations and pharmaceutical companies gained hold and they have more to profit from illness than from health.

After years of torment in mental institutions and his research confiscated, he is desperate to restore his name and reputation, but after further debasement this time at the hands of the United States media, he settles for revenge.

He begins experimentation on a special virus which can infect anyone who comes in contact with it. The virus is called "the rage mutagen" as it embodies all of the fury, hate and rage he can muster.



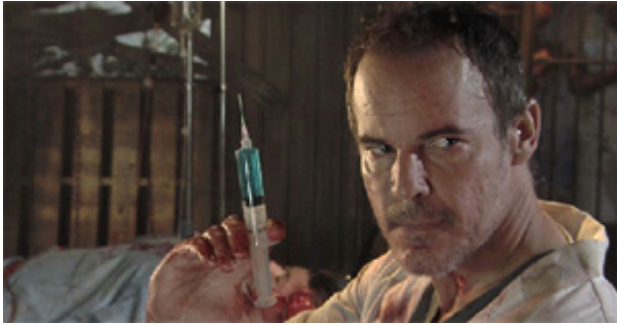
It transforms any individual into a raging, violent killing machine without thought or consciousness. His goal is to infect the world and then offer the cure on the condition that his reputation is restored.

Later in the film we are offered quite a touching flashback of Vasilenko burying his parents and his quest for a cancer cure as well as his betrayal, filmed in muted colours, it is one of the more reflective moments in the film.

The obsessive doctor, now more than a little deranged, experiments with whatever bodies he can find but as the virus becomes more and more extreme, he finds it hard to control his subjects. One of his experiments breaks loose after causing turmoil in his lab. While its lifespan is short and it dies after a minor rampage (!), vultures come to feast on the corpse and the virus is transmitted.

While the doctor only wanted to create a virus transmittable to humans, it seems that because of the unique enzymes vultures carry inside their digestive tracks, the virus has only survived its cross species journey but has mutated and the birds are now infected and transmitting a variant which cannot be cured.





Of course, this leads to a journey into ultra violence, gore, mayhem, special effects overload and everything one would expect from the Master of Splatter. The Rage combines a fast faced plot with lots of action, incredible gore, superior cinematography and excellent acting.

While the “orgy” of gore is effective and certainly gives the senses a work out, the film is also superbly paced and filmed. It has a great mood with lots of suspense and tension and actually offers a good balance between special effects and horror and a good suspense driven story.

The music is impressive combining the dark horror orchestral sounds of Midnight Syndicate (of whom we have written various rave reviews in earlier issues of Synergy) and a few out there songs by heavy metal horror rock band Mushroomhead (the full music clips are in the extras).

The Rage also makes the most of the taboo breaking plot with such superbly perverse scenes, ranging from Reggie Bannister (of Phantasm fame) killing his kid to the lab assistant who is sick of having sex with dead bodies and just wants a live girl.

Kurtzman has also masterfully created a story arc which moves through many different phases and hence is able to really show off the awesome special effects which have been created. By using the zombie vultures infected by “The Rage” mutagen as the central linking factor, he can introduce various zombie characters and mutate and kill them in unusual ways.

This leads to all sorts of permutations such as the vultures, their nests, acidic zombie split, eggs and more. This is a very innovative splatter !

The story arc also moves from the lab through all sorts of sub plots, including the central one with the group of young people in their van returning to the lab near the end. This allows the various degrees of character development including a ménage a trios and a girl on girl bitch fight leading to an awesome van crash !

It also produces some great false endings, just as you think it has all finished, it’s off again. You just think it is safe when the doctor seems dead and then you are off to the world under the lab !



The “underworld” sequence near the end is superb as Josh and Erin have to be battle with the zombies under the lab. This is ultra violent and these creatures just won’t die- how many hits can Gor take ? A screwdriver in the head, a hammer in the skull, a knife in the guts, only disembowelment does it in the end ! Will the doctor evil die ? He has lost his head but he is still coming back for more...

There is an ironic, dark humour to these sequences which is somewhat like a cross between Clive Barker and a comedy routine !! This is a superb over the top climax which will impress, startle and shock. You may ask do they make it in the end ? Well, Watch the skies, the vultures are on the horizon ! There maybe even a sequel, The Rage 2 anyone ?

This is a superbly extreme horror experience, unreservedly unrated, packed with gore and over the top violence. It has a great plot, fast paced story, special effects that are of the highest quality and enough over top scenes to keep you on your toes.

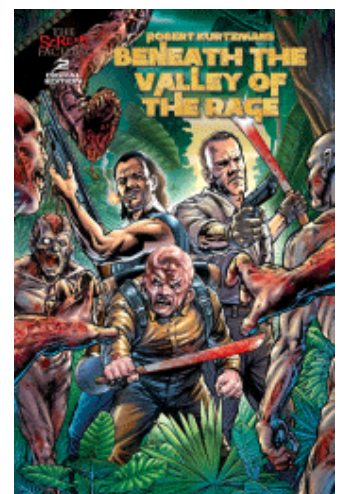
There are some great extras including commentaries, Making Of, Behind the Scenes, Stills Gallery and two Mushroomhead music clips.

### **Beneath the Valley of the Rage**

Four issue prequel to rage produced in dramatic comics books.

Dr.Hellbent is bringing the world to its knees with his serum and transforming mankind into murderous monsters !

Created by Robert Kurtzman and John Bisson with art by Stephen Thompson



### **The Scream Factory**

**Web:** <http://www.myspace.com/screamfactory>

# VAMPIRES, SEX & POWER

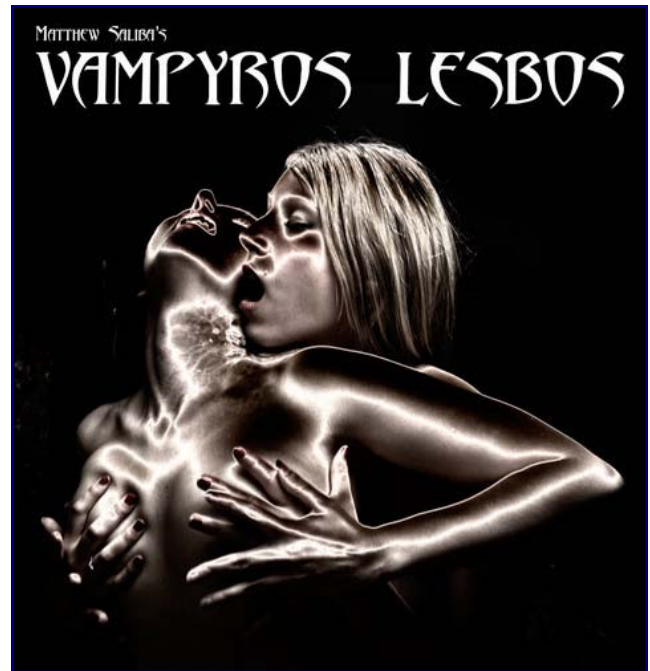
## THE SEXUAL SYMBOLIST SINEMA OF MATTHEW SALIBA

Matthew Saliba is a challenging filmmaker exploring the world of sexuality and symbolism. His work is highly stylized and includes many different levels of possible meaning and interpretation. The first thing one notices about all his works is the innovative use of colour, music and texture with a carefully chosen soundtrack without the intrusion of dialogue. Having watched all of this four short films I would consider his work to be primarily that of a "sexual symbolist". He explores all manner of themes related to male-female power relationships, conflict between the sexes and eroticism in a surreal and symbolic manner. He does so in an extremely creative and sophisticated manner. His latest film, *Vampyros Lesbos* (2008) is his most accomplished production and is an excellent way to introduce the themes which seem to occupy all of his films since within the Vampire legend are the key motifs which seem to saturate his films.

Within the Vampire mythos is a key dichotomy between male and female sexual power. In the earliest vampire stories and films, the master vampire is male, bites and controls the females and creates a controlled menagerie of female vampires. While these women clearly have their own sexual prowess, it is at the males prerogative and under his control. At the same time there is the motif of the independent female vampire, she represents an intrusion against male sexuality, in most cases there is inferred even blatant lesbianism and she is seen as a threat against the male order.

This conflict between male and female sexual power is really seen throughout the various vampire films. Even the death of the vampires via the steak through the heart (or a single beam of light) has a strong phallic emphasis. This seems especially emphasized with the death of female vampires where the crucifix and steak, wielded by men, kill their independent sexual expression as representatives of the Church, the State and the male.

In the earlier Hammer horror films the motifs of both female and male vampire sexuality became more and more obvious, especially with the evolution of films such as the *Vampire Lovers* with their overt lesbian scenes. It is however with the work of Jess Franco with *Vampyros Lesbos* that the themes became more explicitly explored.



While Franco has been a prodigious filmmaker producing with wild abandon many different genres of films (most could be seen primarily within exploitation, horror and eroticism), *Vampyros Lesbos* is still remembered as one of his most accomplished and grounding breaking products.

Matthew Saliba's homage to *Vampyros Lesbos* is an exploration of the same themes in a uniquely stylized and one could nearly say minimalist way. There is no dialogue, only carefully constructed images and set pieces presented with impeccable use of colour and light and music which creates the momentum of the film. *Vampyros Lesbos* is only twenty minutes long but is a very expressive short. It documents the various stages of the male-female power conflict. The male is allured by the sight of the two females (with seductive alluring music) and aroused. He is seduced by the sight and excited yet somewhat challenged by the slow menacing vampire presence emerging into the eroticism.

Yet as his female partner responds, he is challenged by the sign of her independent sexuality and threatened. His male "power" does not satisfy her and she goes to the female vampires for satisfaction. He is "disempowered" and dominated through various forms of female domination. All of these stages are carefully presented with expressive images, very selectively chosen songs and music and postures and gestures which stylish what is being expressed. The use of bondage and sad-masochistic imagery is erotic and beautifully presented.

In many ways the way the film has been presented "compresses" the drama and symbolism into a short and intense form. It seems to communicate directly to the unconscious without the use of words avoiding conscious inference and hence is a powerfully expressive work.





As he escapes he is rescued by a man of the cloth and together they work to re-establish the phallic power of the male and the cross. This is symbolized by the powerful series of scenes at the climax of the film, after he has slaughtered most of the vampires he saves the last one with a giant crucifix phallus which we see enter her from the inside !

These themes of male and female power, sex and domination, conflict and violence are developed throughout all his work. In his earlier film *"The Manipulator and the Subservient"* 2003, (a 10 minute short) we have an early exploration of the same themes but through standard cinematic techniques. It is still without dialogue and has the same superior use of colour, mood and music, but the stylized use of still images doesn't enter his work under his *"She was Asking for It"* in 2007. *The Manipulator and the Subservient* explores the roles of submission and domination in more obvious and less obvious domains. It begins with an obvious domination submission scene with a husband, wife and submissive. However, this moves into more surreal domains exploring domination and submission in what looks like a "normal suburban" environment. The undercurrent being obviously that all sex is power and that all relationships are power relationships.

This is further explored in the truly taboo breaking *"Pandora's Paradox"*, a 24 minute short from 2004. It would be difficult to summarize this surreal, Freudian exploration of polymorphous perversity. The myth of Pandora's Box comes from Hesiod and she was created as a punishment for mankind. The box she held contained all the evils of humanity, which all escapes into the world when it was opened, she was only able to save one item, hope. Traditionally the Box is seen to represent the power of female sexuality and certainly in this short this is what is explored. It opens with a bizarre and violent scene of childbirth, which is rather surreal and shows the birth of a deformed child, which looks like a large thumb.

The film explores all manner of Freudian sexual symbolism. Just some of the references which I saw as pertinent were the exploration of the relationship between being consumed and being the consumer,



power and submission as expressed in conflict and power and, of course, the power of the Oedipal.

Over and over again we see reference to the primal sex scene where the "child" sees the parents sexuality and hence is imprinted with certain tendencies which are again replicated in their own sexual persona. Trauma on Trauma. There are so many levels of interpretation in this short you need to watch it many times over. The literal "returning to the womb scene" and the polymorphous perversity of the parents sex scene using all manner of medical and sexual instruments are superb.

Again the emphasis is on the use of images, colour, sound and light. There is no real dialogue and the momentum is created by the music. Many of themes in the work seem to replicate themselves in different forms so rather than a lineal piece it needs to be explored and considered.

*"She was Asking for it"* is a 10 minute short from 2007 and is the first use by Saliba of still images as the primary form of cinematic expression. In many ways it is a precursor of *Vampyros Lesbos*. It explores the themes of male and female sexual power with very explicit and powerful imagery. It uses images of bondage, submission and violation of the male by female (using various implements) resulting in his "phallic" revenge against the female involved. It is very powerful, brutal and yet beautifully filmed.

All of his works are challenging, intelligent and intriguing. They represent extremely innovative independent filmmaking which communicates in a surprising and unusual manner.

His use of colour, texture, sound and light is both beautiful and delicate and he uses it to explore significantly transgressive territory. I found *Vampyros Lesbos* to be the best representation of the themes present throughout his work, but that being said cannot wait to see what he produces next !

**The Sinema of Matthew Saliba**

**Web:** [http://www.myspace.com/vampyros\\_lesbos](http://www.myspace.com/vampyros_lesbos)

# MONDO COLLECTOR WITH ROCK 'N ROLL RAY

The term “mondo” generally is taken to mean cool and is often used in association with the words strange and bizarre. Mondo films, for example, are strange films documenting the unusual, quirky and downright weird. The most famous of these was the ground breaking “Mondo Cane” which single handedly began the craze of cult documentaries.

Mondo Collector follows in that tradition exploring the world of the collector. Hosted by Rock 'N Roll Ray, who is actually Raymond P Whalen, a Minneapolis filmmaker, we are taken on a journey into the strangest and most unusual collections he can find. To keep our enthusiasm from lagging during the journey we receive liberal doses of go go dancers breaking up the stories with their sexy gyrations to some very cool music.

The film opens with Ted V Mikels and that is a name to conjure with. Mikels has produced independent and cult films since Adam was a lad and is best known for such memorable titles as Mark of the Astro Zombies, Blood Orgy of the She Devils and The Corpse Grinders. Mikels shows off his collection of weapons which range from axes and guns through to homemade bows. He seems to spend a lot of his time convincing us “he doesn't hunt anymore” and showing off his chest !

We then meet the doll (sorry, action figure) collector who has everything from Bonanza figures to Star Trek, Six Million Dollar items to lunch boxes and Batman outfits. He seems rather normal compared to our next character, the Pez Man.

Remember Pez, those little lolly dispensers with the different heads, well our next collector loves them. He tells us that he loves them because “they are like eating lollies from a penis” and his sanity seems to go downhill from there on in. He wants to eat enough Pez so he can die “young, beautiful and naked” since



the old die ugly anyway. A strange and bizarre collecting moment and the image of him naked covered in Pez will stick in your mind for way too long.

But this is just the beginning; we then have a truly obsessive collector who is devoted to the 1974 film Phantom of the Paradise. A strange and unusual rock 'n roll, science fiction and horror tale directed by Brian De Palma. It is a strange and wonderful collection filled with one off items and a rather devoted collector who tells us he came from another world in search of memorabilia ! A great piece with a good mixture of humour and a very unusual if not “focused” collection.

Of course, we then need a dose of religion, and so we are introduced to a sexy lingerie wearing lady who is truly devoted to the Lord. Her house is filled to the brim with all manner of Jesus items, from the more bizarre (a Jesus Penis and whip) to the sublime, a Jesus light bulb. She takes us on a tour of her marvellous home and then whips herself with a Jesus whip after which she gets drunk on communion wine from a very nice and collectible “communion” vessel.

And this is only just the tip of the iceberg, there is Marco the hippy collector, the lead singer of Impaler and his horror collection and the right wing militia-man from Waco who collects all manner of guns and proceeds to blow televisions and computer monitors to pieces with them !

There are so many more strange characters in this marvellous film. It is a true “Mondo” experience, a type of “outsider” cinema which is clearly made on a limited budget and yet succeeds because of it. It has a directness which makes it enjoyable, entertaining and at times downright bewildering !

Throughout we are presented with all manner of weirdness including some deliberately humorous interludes ranging from a possible murderous collector to a man who has a perverse attachment to melons.

This is a superb DVD filled with eccentrics, humor, weirdness and lots of collecting !

**Web:** <http://www.rockandrollray.com>



# BOOKS IN REVIEW



## **1001 Ridiculous Ways to Die** **David Southwell and** **Matt Adams** **Harper Collins 2008**

1001 Ridiculous Ways to Die offers the largest ever collection of hilarious true stories chronicling the most ridiculous, bizarre and astonishingly stupid deaths.



It offers items from ancient Greece to the Outback, from the 6th century BCE to 2008, all the most preposterous deaths from across time and around the globe are recorded.

Hundreds of entertaining, factual accounts of bizarre, amazing and absurd ways to kick the bucket are compiled in this book. A huge collection of incredible cautionary tales about the most undignified and embarrassing ways you can end up six foot under.

The book is divided into categories such as Ridiculous Deaths, Top 10 Work related death and alcohol related deaths, historical deaths covering various time frames, crime deaths, political deaths, DIY deaths, celebrity deaths and a lot more.

There are some incredible true tales of stupidity, irony and just plain bad luck in this darkly humorous book –

The mechanic who blew himself up while trying to open a rocket-propelled grenade with a sledgehammer.

A woman felled by a fatal flying lettuce.

The octogenarian who caught a shopping trolley to a permanent vacation.

A criminal who was pursuing his cousin to cut open his leg with a chainsaw to claim an insurance job instead injured himself and bled to death.

The convicted murderer who electrocuted himself on the toilet as he repaired a TV.

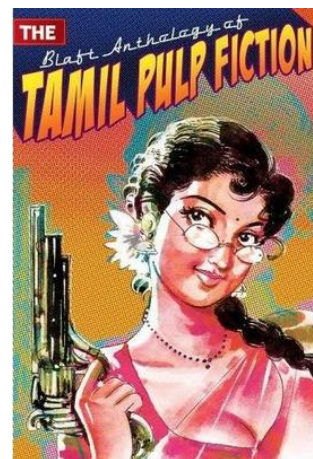
A celebrity who survived riding over Niagara falls in a barrel only to die when he slipped on an orange peel at a press event !

I was especially amused by the committed Christian who while carrying a sign stating "The End is Nigh" was hit by a car and killed.

Death may seem like a serious business, but this is a seriously funny book !

## **The Blaft Anthology of Tamil Pulp Fiction** **Blaft Publications** **2008**

**Web :** <http://www.blaft.com>



Pulp fiction is a term used in the west for cheap paperback novels which were genre based primarily within detective, romance, horror and science fiction fields.

They were common in the mid twentieth century and marked by all manner of excess, filled to the brim with action, sex and strange plots. The term pulp came from the cheap paper that they were made from. Their origin was in the vast number of cheap pulp serial magazines which were popular from the 1920s to 1950s.

When I think of Indian literature or Tamil, I don't immediately think of pulp fiction and yet that is perhaps because as a Westerner I have a certain "exotic" view of Indian literature and do not see its breadth or depth.

This book certainly changed my mind ! By the 1950s, it seems, Tamil Nadu had its own pulp literature. Pritham K. Chakravarthy in "Tamil Pulp Fiction" notes that these novels were, 'printed on recycled sani paper and priced at 50 paise a copy,' she continues " In the 1980s, with the advent of desktop publishing, printing in large volumes became more economical, and thin pulp novels began to appear in tea stalls and bus stations."

The Blaft Anthology of Tamil Pulp fiction offers for the first time in English a great selection of Tamil Pulp fiction tales and what great tales they are ! On the back of the book we are told these tales include "Mad Scientists, hard-boiled detectives, vengeful goddesses, murderous robots, scandalous starlets and drug fuelled love affairs" – sounds alright to me ! There are seventeen tales by ten of India's best-selling authors and they are a damn good read. Certainly to fit them into a single volume they are relatively short and as they are translated by a single individual, the tone all seems much the same and perhaps misses some of the nuances of each author, but that is a trifle.

We are in luck just to have an opportunity to read such tales ! It also includes some sixteen pages of colour colours from the books in the centre of the book.

This is a very unusual anthology and one which offers a very different take on pulp fiction and is worth making the effort to get hold of.

(If you have trouble finding a copy, it is available via Amazon.com)

**Web:** <http://www.blaft.com>

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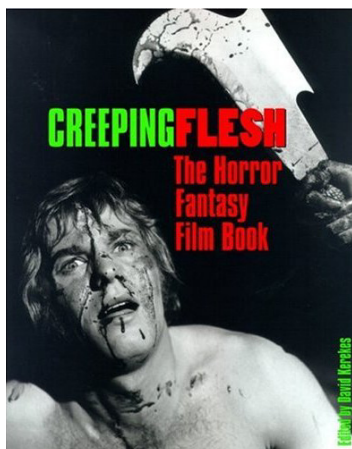
**Creeping Flesh:  
The Horror  
Fantasy Book  
David Kerekes  
Headpress (2003)**

Creeping Flesh is a great read, it is obviously the result of an absolute obsession with the byways of English genre TV and cinema and offers an enthusiasts guide to this overlooked field.

We first get a solid introduction to the nature of BBC genre cinema from horror, science fiction to way beyond and then we get into some truly impressive research.

A Ghost Story for Christmas focuses on the ghost stories which were run on the BBC between 1971 and 1978 and offers a comprehensive overview of each program with extensive notes and rare images and screenshots.

This is followed by a series of essays on various unique BBC horror and genre shows ranging from the outrageous The Year of the Sex Olympics (1968) to discussions of Hammer Horror classics and an



interview with the British Film Institute. Each of these pieces is impeccably researched and offers background information, synopsis' and references not found in other volumes.

The third section of Creeping Flesh offers quite in depth studies on unusual films interspersed with interviews and concluding with brief reviews, an interview with the editors of Sleazoid express and discussions of other cult cinema zines.

There is an excellent study of Killer Moon and the Fantastist, House of the Baskervilles and Sleepwalker and some insight into the ideas and literature (especially the 1967 book Ritual) which helped formulate aspects of the cult classic The Wicker Man.

There is lots more in Creeping Flesh and all the articles and reviews are well researched, well referenced and have rare and unusual screenshots and images. While published in 2003, Creeping Flesh has not dated as it covers territory not found in many other publications and the research in the essays and articles is still some of the best in the field.

**Web:** <http://www.headpress.com>

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**Creeping Flesh  
The Horror Fantasy Film Book  
Volume 2  
Headpress  
Web:** <http://www.headpress.com>

Creeping Flesh Volume 1 was a great success, it brought an erudite and intelligent eye on the forgotten and ignored corners of cinema. Volume two continues in this vein offering more insightful commentary on titles from the edges of cinema.

It opens with a superb article on They Call Her One Eye, an outrageous 1974 rape revenge film which was so brutal it was banned in Europe and pretty well all other releases were heavily cut.

It had a major influence on Quentin Tarantino and he openly admits it inspired one of the major characters in Kill Bill. We not only get an excellent overview of the film but a rare interview with its director, Bo Arne Vibenius.

Continuing in the vein we explore rape revenge films in general with a special reference to the classic "I spit on Your Grave".

Creeping Flesh Volume 2 then moves into other aspects of Cruelty in film and in "Once Upon a Time in China" explores the cinematic world of the Chinese Triads and the films of Alberto Cavellone – Blue Movie and Spell. There is an interview with director David Jacobson of Dahmer fame and Twisted Nerve, a collaboration between the Boulting Brothers and Leo Marks, who wrote Peeping Tom.



There is also a great discussion of that under-rated (perhaps deservedly so!) sub genre from the 1970's, the Cheerleader film !

Part two of Creeping Flesh Volume 2 will have a special resonance from readers of Synergy as it focuses on Australian fantasy cinema.

It opens with the Eerie Aborigine looking at the world of Seventies Australian cinema where traditional aboriginal values (and the land itself) clashes with modern sensibilities.

In Razorback and Roadgames there is a great exploration of the work of Everett De Roche. The theme is continued with an interview Chris Lofven, director of the Australian Wizard of Oz, 1976 and a discussion of Jack be Nimble from New Zealand.

This section of Creeping Flesh Volume 2 is really worth a read since in 2008 Australia has seen a major revival of interest in Australian "Ozploitation" cinema. Many of the Seventies films which have languished in film archives are now being remastered and released and there is a major doco on the subject in "Not Quite Hollywood" which has received rave reviews as it hit the big screen across Australia and is soon to be released on DVD.

So while Creeping flesh Volume 2 may have been released quite a time again, it has now become very timely !!!

Part 3 explores the world of Classic Television and includes all sorts of fascinating articles including horror Children on Television.

Once again Creeping Flesh offers some of the most insightful and interesting commentary on film and television published today. It treks through the by-ways of long forgotten cinema, explores taboo realms and charts territories which are way off the map !

This volume is especially pertinent in the Australian market since a large number of Australian fantasy and Seventies films are being released due to the resurgence of interest in Aussie Seventies cinema, so this is a volume well worth getting hold of.



## Film Tales Movie Trivia in the Age of DVD Robert Cettl Inkstone Press

DVD has brought cinema from around the world into the home and changed the face of cinema forever.

While video tape started the revolution, it was DVD that really made it happen, especially when it comes to world, cult and art-house cinema.

While in the past World cinema, cult films and art-house were seen by the few, now they have become common place, but to really appreciate the world of cinema we need to get behind the facade and come to understand something about the directors, producers and people who make these strange and wonderful films, in other words, we need to get into their heads.

Film Tales, Movie Trivia in the Age of the DVD, does just that. It is a fantastic exploration of all manner of news, trivia and just plain "tales out of school". Cettl has collected the best possible items and recorded them as bite sized pieces categorized according to genre.

There is everything from Westerns to Classics, Science Fiction to Erotica, Exploitation to Cult and of course, the Hollywood flops !

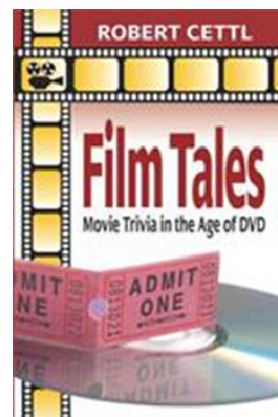
Cettl has an easy writing style and is able present his subject matter in an entertaining and enjoyable manner, he even includes questions at the begging of each chapter with answers at the end. So if you want to appear as a real film tragic, here is your chance!!

Film Tales is a great packed with movie trivia, scoops and strange facts and is a real must for any movie buff !

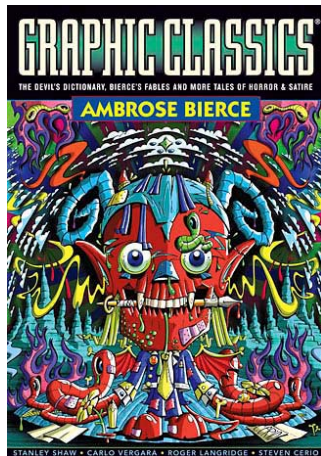
**Web:** <http://www.inkstone-press.com>

**Graphic Classics**  
**Ambrose Bierce**  
**Eureka Productions 2008**  
**Web:** <http://www.graphicclassics.com/>

Ambrose Bierce (June 24, 1842 – 1913 ?) was an American journalist, short-story writer and satirist. While he is best known for his cynical and snide work, The Devil's Dictionary, he also produced many short stories which could be classified as horror and fantasy.



All of his writings are infused with a darkly realistic view of human nature, indeed he wrote with such cynicism that he became known as "Bitter Bierce". He was also respected and feared as a critic with a truly insightful yet fearless editorial style which always courted controversy, at various times during his career his various employers had to fight off complaints and possible legal action due to vehement commentary.



His literary output was prodigious, his collected works come to some twelve volumes including some of the best 19th century short stories and tales. Bierce was dedicated to the refined use of the English language and was noted for his mastery of wit, irony and style.

One of the greatest mysteries is how he died. He has travelled to Mexico and joined Pancho Villa's army as an observer, it is recorded that he travelled as far as Chihuahua. Yet after a letter to a friend dated December 26, 1913, he vanished without a trace.

The Graphic Classics edition offers selections of Bierce's works and is in a word stunning. I have always been impressed with the production values and artistic styles used in Graphic Classics, but in this volume they have excelled themselves. Bierce's work really suits a comic style as it includes horror and fantasy as well as dark sense of humour.

This work is a little unusual for Graphic Classics as it includes a lot more text than other volumes. The selections from the Devil's Dictionary are superbly done, we have nice excerpts accompanied by rather marvellous if not a little surreal full page illustrations. There is also a great selection of Bierce's fables, all illustrated in different styles by different artists.

This is one of the things that always impresses me about Graphic Classics, there is such a breadth of graphic style in every issue, different stories are interpreted in unique ways and illustrated according to the styles of each artist. This offers a great visual as well as literary experience and in my mind this is exceptionally well represented in the current volume.

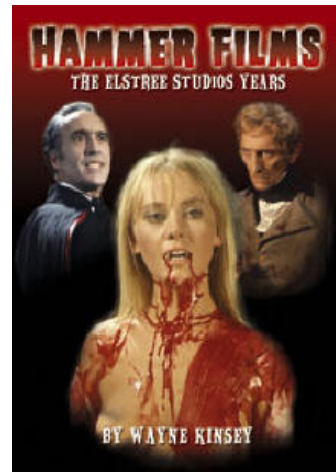
There are lots of other tales besides the dictionary and fables even including a rather fun examination of all the rumours about Bierce's death !

Graphic Classics Ambrose Bierce is a second edition with some 70 extra pages, it is 144 pages with lovely colour covers and black and white high quality graphic art throughout.

## **Hammer Films** **The Elstree Studio** **Years** **Wayne Kinsey** **Tomahawk Press**

Hammer Studios has fascinated the fan of horror and cult films since their earliest days. It is amazing to consider that in 2008 there are still a large number of books, documentaries and arti-

cles written about Hammer and indeed so many of their films are still being remastered and released on DVD. While there have been lots of titles covering the history of Hammer films in general and certain genres of films in particular, this is quite a unique volume as it focuses in on a specific period in the history of the Hammer Studios, from 1967 to the present day, during which it moved to the Elstree Studios.



This period has been a difficult if not terrible one for Hammer. During this period Hammer literally plummeted from being one of the most celebrated and successful British film companies to becoming bankrupt. In this fascinating volume, Kinsey examines what went wrong with Hammer during this period.

Using extensive records, interviews and primary source materials, Kinsey looks at all aspects of Hammer's operations during this period including its battle with the censors and problems with bringing its product to a new market. Indeed this last dilemma proved the biggest disaster for Hammer, as the market transformed, Hammer was unable to sustain the pace and continued to produce the product for which it had been celebrated, sadly however, the world had moved on and success was not forthcoming.

Even with the embracing of sex, nudity and increased gore in the Seventies Hammer seemed unable to grasp the demands of the changing market and did not appreciate the new forms of horror which were developing around it.

Hammer Films – The Elstree Studio Years is a superbly produced volume which is meticulously researched. The sheer volume of information of information in this book is astounding and the level of detail incredible - every possible reference, piece of trivia, reflection and memory the author can find is recorded !

While it is a solid tome and one which will take some time to work through, it is certainly worth the effort. It also includes over 700 rare photographs, images and documents and hence is also a superb book to just sit and look through.





tried to delve into the emotional lives of these couples and look at them from a different way and I think this makes this book stand out. It is not a series of "puff" pieces either, the partners are incredibly honest, sometimes brutally so, this is warts and all stuff, folks.

Bell has also tried to offer a diversity of couples including couples where the woman is the artist and a gay couple as well.

Along the way we get all sorts of insight into the creative process, the life-story of some comic book creators and their partners, the difficulties and ups and downs of the artistic life and, of course, lots of anecdotes, memories and recollections you won't find anywhere else !!

**Web:** <http://www.twomorrows.com>

**Me and My Holden**  
**Don Loffler**  
**Wakefield Press 2008**

#### **A Nostalgia Trip With The Early Holdens**

**Reviewer**  
Bob Estreich

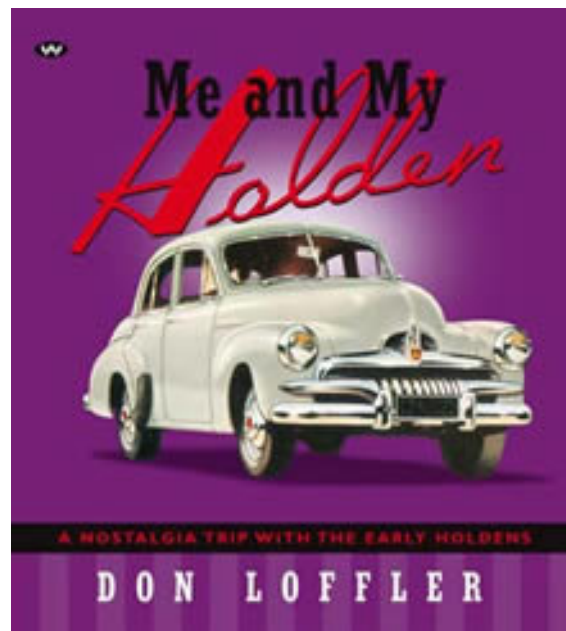
The "FX" Holden was released in the late 1940s to immediate popularity. Its restyled follower, the FJ, was just as popular. Don Loffler's third book on early Holdens records the people who drove them and loved them.

Just after the second World War Australia got its cars from two sources. There were the light, flimsy sports cars from Britain and their small "family car" relatives. Neither held up well on Australia's excuses for roads. Then there were the "Yank Tanks" – the Studebakers, Fords and Chryslers. Big, solid, thirsty. It was a long way between petrol pumps in those days.

There was nothing much in the middle of these two ranges until General Motors-Holdens released their first car, the so-called FX (more correctly, the 48-215). It was US-designed and Australian-built, with a roomy body, high ground clearance, and a lazy engine big enough to tow a caravan but more economic than an American V8. In the post-War boom many Australians first hit the road in a Holden.

Although Don Loffler does not write the book as a history, there is enough historical information scattered through the book to give it authority. His description of the colours available is something I have never seen anywhere else.

Some of the accessories he details are hilarious, and would be quite illegal now. He has included a large amount of Holden promotional posters and



material among the photos, and they are wonderful period pieces in their own way.

Mostly, though, he lets the owners and their photos tell the stories. At a time when photography was expensive, the number of people who photographed their Holden was amazing.

There are Holden honeymoon stories, a long arduous Holden trip through Central Australia, Holdens on their side, Holdens in rallies, Holdens desperately overloaded, and even a Holden hearse. I particularly liked Rodney Prusa's story of the second-hand Holden he went to buy which turned out to be the one his father had sold twenty four years earlier.

I also liked the way the owners do not gloss over the car's weaknesses - the vacuum wipers which were useless in anything heavier than a light fog, the car's fantastic ability to let water in, and of course, Rust.

The book is beautifully presented, hard bound and printed on high quality paper, and lavishly illustrated. The quality binding is a good thing, because this book is going to be passed around a lot as the nostalgia kicks in.

At first I thought "coffee table book", but as I read through it I can see this book taking pride of place on many a Holden owner's bookshelf. Even if you never owned an FX or FJ, or even a Holden, it's a great read and Don manages to convey something of the pride that so many Australians felt in their home-grown car.

The book is well worth its cost, and with Christmas coming I can see it being a popular gift for many Dads. Mum and Dad will love it, the kids will laugh at it and call it Quaint, but no one will ignore it.



**Secret of the  
Sideshows**  
Joe Nickell  
University of  
Kentucky Press  
2008

To millions modern theme parks may seem like drastically improved versions of the itinerant shows and attractions of the past, featuring manicured thoroughfares, towering thrill rides, and plenty of marketing opportunities for big corporations.

Yet, today's family-friendly yet bland getaways stand in stark contrast to the worn facilities and colorful atmosphere found at the carnivals, circuses, and sideshows that once lured hordes of visitors.

However, many would argue that today's sanitized amusement empires lack the character, uniqueness, ramshackle charm and sense of wonder that pervaded travelling shows during a bygone era. By removing the risk and the daring of the sideshow, the modern theme park has become a cliché with its insipid entertainment and "family friendly" focus.

In an age far less saturated with media, circuses and sideshows were the vanguard of popular entertainment, and they were a booming business. In his book, *Secrets of the Sideshows* Joe Nickell, once a carnival magician and pitchman, now an acclaimed



author, historical document expert, and paranormal investigator and sceptic, chronicles the rise and fall of the sideshow.

Nickell examines the amazing tales and stories behind the sideshows' amazing sights and spectacles while analysing their cultural antecedents and the social forces that led to their massive popularity throughout most of the twentieth century. The author's insights are the result of years of research interviews, and first-hand experience.

Ever the ambitious investigator, Nickell learned to eat fire, to walk on hot coals and to recline on a bed of nails during his journeys to carnival midways and other venues across the world.

The giants, midgets, sword swallows fire eaters, bearded ladies, and alligator-skinned men are all here, and *Secrets of the Sideshows* presents their public and private lives in full, bizarre detail including rare illustrations and photographs.

Nickell tells the long history of displaying human, animal, and other oddities-both authentic and bogus-by shrewd entrepreneurs looking to capitalize on the curiosity of paying customers.

In the tradition of Harry Houdini and others devoted to debunking dubious feats and fraudulent claims, Nickell calls a fake a fake while still showing respect for the sideshow's legacy of mystery and illusion.

*Secrets of the Sideshows* neither romanticizes the past nor discounts the real pleasure that millions of people have gained from sideshows. Some of the real-life characters in the book are hucksters' others are saddled with maladies of the flesh and in need of both financial and emotional support. Nickell portrays the humanity of all participants in the once thriving culture of the sideshow.

*Secrets of the Sideshows* is beautifully written, filled with stories, reflections, tales and memories, it is both a historical study and a journey into memory.

It is packed with rare photographs, ephemera and images (some 178 in all) and offers a fascinating glimpse into a sub culture which is now slowly fading from history.



**Top Gear  
Top Drives  
BBC Books 2008  
Michael Harvey  
Australia:  
Random House**

**Reviewer:**  
Bob Estreich

If you are a fan of the TV series, be warned that this book is not about the TV show.

You don't get Jeremy Clarkson thundering around a carefully-maintained track in the latest Masturbati, screaming "POWER ! POWER!" and "I have soiled myself".

The book is about real drivers (well, most of them) driving real cars on real roads. It's about the sheer pleasure of going for a long drive somewhere difficult or challenging.

Jeremy does make an appearance, though. James May writes about him in the first chapter, and we learn that Mr. Clarkson swears in his sleep, cannot put up a tent even with the help of his favourite tool (a hammer) and how he shot James' can of Spam. The trip to the North Pole was not one of James' favourite journeys.

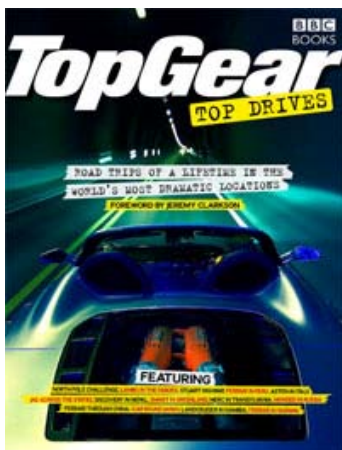
Some of the drives are rather poorly matched against the cars. Why would you take a Ferrari over the Andes? Or a tiny city car to the Arctic Circle? Well, just for the sake of doing it, really. Jeeps, Ford utes, early Volkswagen Beetles, Mondeos – these are cars we can relate to, and it's fascinating to see what they are like outside their usual environment.

If you own one of the cars featured in this book, you will feel a little bit of pride after seeing what it can do under adverse conditions.

The writers are good at their job, and convey a vivid picture of the cars and the countries and the people. The book could be in danger of turning into a travelogue, but the cars are the stars.

The humour of the TV show is there in the writing, often expressed by the locals rather than the journalists. "We don't usually travel at more than 130 kilometres an hour, but who the hell are you to tell us that we can't?" or "I have a friend in Moscow. He'll meet you at the Belarus border in a Discovery full of men with guns".

Top Drives is luxuriously illustrated. The photography matches the quality of the writing, with some absolutely spectacular scenery (with cars in it, of course). Many of the chapters are not about a long drive so much as a life-threatening adventure.

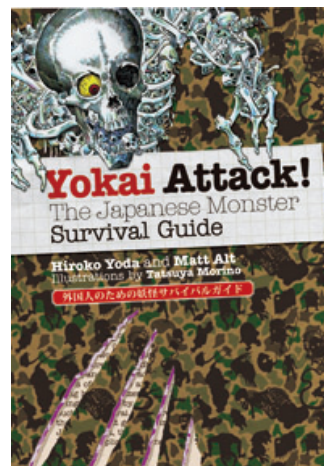


The photos show just how adventurous.

With the price of petrol going sky-high as it runs out, this could well be one of the last books on the sheer pleasure of "going for a drive".

*Buy it and enjoy it.*

**Yokai Attack  
The Japanese  
Monster Survival  
Guide  
Hiroko Yoda and  
Matt Alt  
Illustrations by  
Tatsuya Morino  
Kodansha International  
Bookwise 2008  
(Australia)**



The term Yokai is used in Japanese folklore to refer to the diverse denizens of the spirit world ranging from ghosts through to goblins, dwarves, nature spirits and a range of other strange and wonderful creatures. Since Japan is primarily a Buddhist country, the Yokai tend to be a mixture of traditional animist and nature spirits overlaid with the later adopted Buddhist cosmology.

This mixing of traditions is significant since Buddhism does not believe in either a personal god nor an ultimate "good or evil" and hence the Yokai range from the naughty to nice, malevolent to ambivalent and most are somewhere in-between, depending on their mood and bearing.

While the term Yokai is sometimes translated as hobgoblin, the two Japanese characters actually simply means otherworldly or weird.

It was in 1776 with the "Illustrated Night Parade of Demons" that the first major iconographic representation of the Yokai began with fifty rather picturesque images.







**Scene from the Great Yokai War**

This is still considered a work of major significance within Japanese literature.

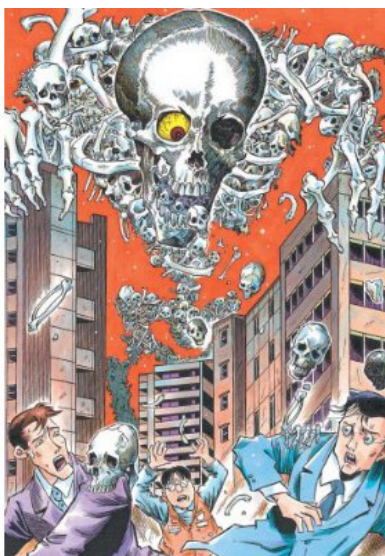
Due to a strange twist of fate a westerner had a major influence on the revival of interest in the Yokai. In 1890 Patrick Lafcadio Hearn gained Japanese citizenship after developing a fascination with Japanese culture. He took the name Koizumi Yakumo and married Setsu Koizumi, the daughter of a local samurai family.

He took a teaching position and wrote a wide range of books about Japanese folklore and ghost tales. He wrote some fourteen books (and many more articles) including the influential *Kwaidan: Stories and Studies of Strange Things* in 1903 which was to become a major film of the same name by Masaki Kobayashi in 1964.

His books led to a revival of interest in the field, which was further fuelled by a range of Manga comics about the Yokai penned in the late Fifties, known as *Hakaba Kitarō* (Graveyard Kitaro) by Shigeru Mizuki. These were later developed into the anime series *Ge Ge Ge no Kitaro*.

Anime took to the traditions of Yokai and a wide range of films continue to be produced. One of the most spectacular is *The Great Yokai War* (Yōkai daizensō 2005) by Takashi Miike, a film which literally includes hundreds of Yokai!

*Yokai Attack* is a spectacular guide to the Yo-



kai, lovingly researched and beautifully illustrated; it offers an encyclopedia of Japanese folklore packaged for today's lover of manga, anime and cinema.

It offers an excellent overview of Yokai history and terminology and divides them according to their general characteristics i.e. Ferocious Fiends, Gruesome Gourmets, Annoying Neighbours, the Sexy and the Slimy and the Wimps. Each Yokai is described in some detail.

For example, let's choose Tofu Kozo or better known as the Tofu Boy !!

We find Tofu Kozu is Yokai 16 in the Gruesome Gourmet section, we learn the pronunciation of his name, his English name (Tofu Boy), his height, weight and various features and of course his favourite food and weapon, in this case they are both Tofu !!!

We also learn about his habitat and an extensive outline of his claim to fame in folklore accompanied by a nice full page colour image. This is followed with details of how he attacks, how to survive an encounter with Tofu boy and quite a bit more, even some Tofu proverbs !

*Yokai attacks* is quite an extensive guide and concludes with a good resources section covering some great movies and websites. Its comic style illustrations and superb presentation make it a fun, entertaining and informative guide to an important facet of Japanese folklore and cinema.

# SQUEEZEBOX BOOM

## Logitech Squeezebox Boom all-in-one network music player

The Squeezebox has been around for quite a while and has evolved into one of the very best music network peripherals on the market. It began as a simple network front end (wireless or ethernet) which primarily played mp3 and a small range of other formats. As years went on it evolved to play a amazing array of formats (MP3, WMA, Ogg, FLAC, WAV, and AIFF) and to support a range of subscription services and internet radio.

Various editions of the Squeezebox are available, each receiving very positive reviews at release. The Squeezebox Boom has already been awarded the CNET Editor's Choice award for September 2008. These include the Squeezebox Classic and the high end Squeezebox Transporter. There is also the Squeezebox Duet a network player with a simplified design that comes with a superb controller which offers a 2.4-inch color display.

The one thing I always thought was missing was the amplification side of the device; it was always a bit of a nuisance to add speakers and amplification to each device in every room. While this was fine for a audiophile setup (such as a high end stereo setup with the Transporter), for anyone with Squeezeboxes in multiple rooms it becomes a bit of a nightmare.

Now with the release of the all-in one-player the Squeezebox is taken to a new level. The Squeezebox Boom features an integrated amplifier, high-performance speakers and a simplified setup.

The Squeezebox Boom network music player offers



an integrated, all-digital 30-watt amplifier accompanied by two ¾-inch, high-definition, soft-dome tweeters and two 3-inch, high-power, long-throw woofers. A bi-amplified design – which includes a high-performance signal processor, class-D amplifier and digital crossover – delivers crystal clear sound with minimal noise and distortion. For bass lovers, the Squeezebox Boom even includes a subwoofer connection. If you want to listen to music in private, the 3.5 mm jack lets you plug in your headphones.

*“The network music player will be the CD player of the 21st century, and Squeezebox Boom is the first player in its class to deliver high-quality audio in a compact, all-in-one design,”* said Robin Selden, vice president and general manager of Logitech's Streaming Media business unit.

*“From the streamlined setup to the breakthrough acoustics, the Squeezebox Boom is an entirely new type of network music player. Just plug it in and you're ready to rock the house.”*







## Simple Setup

How simple is the Squeezebox Boom to setup? With many other network devices there are so many different steps and stages to the process. With the Boom you simply install the software, allow it to scan your music, plug in the Boom and connect it to your wireless network and that's it – it is ready to go ! It is so simple. We already had the software installed and our music scanned and it took a record 40 seconds to get the Boom working ! Adding Squeezebox Boom to your network was so simple, the player automatically detected the available networks, we selected the one we wanted, entered our password and since the Squeezebox remembered the password, we were on – permanently. Superb !

## Wireless

The wireless side of the Boom works like a charm, no external speaks, no cables or mess, just a power cable. There was no network problems, no congestion or splutter, we tested it at various places around our premises and it has no problems whatsoever. The Squeezebox Boom uses true 802.11g wireless technology and dual internal antennas. We also liked the fact that it not only offers our own music collection but offers the ability to use Internet radio stations and subscription services such as Rhapsody®, Last.FM, Slacker, Pandora® and Sirius® – even when the computer is off. (Some of these services are not available in Australia as yet).

The software which works in the background is impressive and easy to use, if you use the Duet controller or Softsqueeze on your computer or PDA, you can access all sorts of extras including cover images of each album.

There are regular refinements and updates to the software supporting new subscription services, formats and networks.

The formats offered covered pretty well all bases and so in most cases your music will be automatically scanned and sorted with all sorts of options including album, artist, genre, year etc. There is even a nice random option for the days you just can't make up your mind.

## Remote

The included remote control gives you control of the Squeezebox Boom from across the room. It is a nice, small and easy to use remote which has been carefully designed for simple and easy operation. It is more compact than the earlier controller and stripped back to make it even more intuitive. It also includes a tiny magnet that lets you easily attach it to the top of the Squeezebox Boom or, for example, your refrigerator.

## Quality

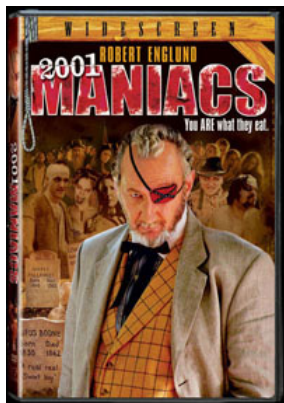
The major thing about the Squeezebox has always been the superb sound quality. There may be lots of different networking devices on the market and some of them even stream video content. However, simply put, when you create a device to cover all bases (video and audio), something has to give and that is usually quality.

The Squeezebox has always been about music with an emphasis on quality. There are regularly updates refining its software and the quality of the product cannot be faulted. Now that it also includes superior amplification and speakers, it becomes a truly unique product and a "must have" device for anyone who uses digital music (and who doesn't) or has a large music collection they wish to easily manage and access via their computer.

# CINEMA & DVD IN REVIEW



**2001 Maniacs**  
**Robert Englund**  
**R1: Lionsgate**  
**R4: Beyond**  
**Entertainment**



It is no exaggeration to say that in 1963 Herschell Gordon Lewis changed the world of cinema. Predicting the end of soft erotica and "roughies" he saw the future in horror and made a graphically over the top film gorefest called Blood Feast. Blood Feast shocked the establishment, horrified critics and had drive-ins filled to captivity with would be customers lined up around the block ! He soon followed this with 2,000 Maniacs, a redneck horror film set in the South with a dark sense of humour and packed with gore.

2001 Maniacs is not really a remake but a homage. Produced by Raw Nerve, a production company made up of horror heavy weights Eli Roth (Cabin Fever, Hostel) Scott Spiegel (Evil Dead) and director, writer and producer Boaz Yakin (Remember the Titans), it certainly had lots of good PR before it even hit the shelves.

With Robert Englund in the starring role and Playboy Model Crista Campbell it certainly looks great before the story even unfolds. Using Herschell Gordon Lewis' opening soundtrack, song and characters it makes a superb modern adaptation.

The storyline has everything one would expect from a redneck horror film. Various young men and women on spring break are shunted via a detour to a town called Pleasant Valley. They are welcomed with open arms by the local people who seem to be having some sort of celebration.

The townsfolk are friendly, a bit too friendly and seem rather quaint and strange. There is a superb sense of "inbred" dread created by the townspeople constant use of outdated language, strange dress and folk songs. Never mind their lack of electricity, technology and old world values.

The folk music is especially fun, it is like the soundtrack from the "Wicker Man" meets South park! It

adds a perversely circus like feel to the whole film which lifts it from being just another splatter spectacular to a film with lots of dry humour, wit and mood.

2001 Maniacs is merciless in its satire of those who hold to "heritage", especially those attached to "Southern Values" and "Civil War Culture". It is politically incorrect making all sorts of jokes about race, sex, corn holing and more.

It walks a thin line, using all sorts of stereotypes about inbreds, rednecks, race and sex while also satirizing those who are narrow enough to believe them. While you do need a broad sense of humour here, it is worth it because 2001 Maniacs is also a great gore and splatter film.

The crux of the tale is that these townspeople are actually the revengeful dead who were killed by the Yankees during the civil war and through their quest for vengeance are driven to return year after year to feed, literally on the living. There are lots of outrageous killings ranging from an oral sex horror scene, squashing in a cotton press, death by giant bell and a poker up the behind and out the mouth, all leading to the final serving of "long pig" for the celebratory dinner. Of course, just when you think they have escaped, revenge is still served.

This is a great DVD package filled to the brim with extras ranging from commentaries to Making Of documentary and an incredible range of deleted and alternate scenes.

This is a gore filled politically incorrect splatter spectacular which will have you screaming and laughing at the same time.





**Big Bang Love,  
Juvenile A**  
**Takashi Miike**  
**AnimeEgo**  
**2 DVD**  
**R1 DVD**

Big Bang Love is a very unusual piece of Miike Cinema, while it certainly has similarities to some of his other films, *Gozu* comes immediately to mind, it seems startlingly different to his *Yakuza* or action films and many Miike fans will find it a bit of a shock.



It is a startlingly beautiful film, moving and powerful, many of the scenes are minimalist using light, shadow, colour and narration to express its ideas. Its innate artificiality give it the feeling of a stage play, the film opens with a strange "play reading" which sets a unique tone for the whole film.

On one level it has a straight forward narrative structure, two young men are imprisoned on the same day for totally unrelated murders. While both men are miles apart, something draws them together. Jun is a withdrawn, sullen and silent young man, who killed a patron of the gay bar where he worked after he was sexually assaulted. Shiro, on the other hand, is a feminine yet tattooed mobster who seems to ooze both violence and sex at the same time.

He is self assured in terms of both strength and sex, yet seems to lack the ability to experience true intimacy or closeness. For some reason Shiro protects young Jun and a sympathy develops. While this is clearly homo-erotic, it avoids sexual content. It is as though Miike has deliberately suggests the emotional bonds that arises between the two but depicts both as so damaged they cannot express their budding affection in a physical way. In a telling moment Shiro describes how he would rather be in space where there are less people and that he only has sex to get rid of the feeling of physical irritation.

The crux of the story is why Jun is discovered seemingly strangling Shiro. This leads to a quirky detective whodunit with a range of positive motives including the warden of the prison, whose wife Shiro raped to other prisoners who may have a beef with him.

As the story progresses there are vignettes of both the young men's past, not as justifications, but as explanations of how they have reached where they are.

The conclusion is intriguing, we find both an attempted murder of Shiro by another prisoner and ultimately Shiro's suicide by his own hand. This leads Jun, in a moment of great loss, to ponder why Shiro did not love him enough to allow him to help him die and hence the scene which is witnessed by the guards.

Big Bang Love has a lot to offer, not only are the two main actors, Ryuhei Matsuda and Masanobu Ando stunningly beautiful, but they express an angst and vulnerability that is surprisingly touching. Regardless of how much violence Shiro seems to display, it is as though there is a young brutalized child underneath trying to make his way in a world from which he feels alienated. It is a sad film that offers no answers or explanations, it simply explores the harshness of life and the suffering it has produced and in typical Japanese style, shows how tenderness can still arise even from within the most fragile of situations.

This is controversial and challenging cinema. It offers both a moving narrative exploration of homo-eroticism coupled with abstract and surreal scenes exploration the meaning of life. It will take many viewings to gain insight into all the various layers Miike has encoded into this film, even to the point of discussions of life after death and the symbolic nature of heaven and outer space as possible afterlife destinations.

The edition from AnimEgo is absolutely stunning. This is an unusual film packed with dialogue, complex discussion and references and could easily be difficult to view. However, they have included not only subtitles (in choice of white or yellow, no less) but added captions as well if you want them.



The quality of the picture is faultless, for a film which has such a visual presence it is a beautiful picture, the colour are bright, the sound is crisp and clear and it offers a superb 16:9 Anamorphic widescreen edition.

But that is not all, this is a two DVD set with a second disc packed with extras. These include the Making of Big Bang Love, Juvenile A Featurette, an excellent Takashi Miike interview, image Gallery, theatrical Trailers, program notes and cast and crew biographies

**Web:** <http://www.animeigo.com>

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**The Black Order  
Cometh  
Satanic Sluts  
Redemption  
All Region**

Satanic Sluts: The Black Order Cometh is a series of vignettes starring the "Satanic Sluts" six women who unleash the darkness and lose their souls. Each of these eighteen segments range from the shortest at about a minute to around 12-14 minutes in length. Each set piece is stylish, surreal and abstract, using a combination of imagery and a superb dark edged electro sound to create a powerful mood. The subject matter explored ranges from bondage, whipping, rope work, surgery, bloodletting to nun crucifixion and occult and religious imagery.

The Black Order Cometh is a fascinating, disturbing and highly erotically charged exploration of dark sexuality and religious trends.

The woman are all extremely beautiful and are both enticing and terrifying, they offer a real mixture of



eroticism and wickedness ! There are some quite amazing scenes ranging from the surgery enactment to the nun crucifixion and, of course, the marvellous vampire scene and a great rope sequence. All of the scenes have a dream/nightmare like quality, even the surgery scene has the woman tied with large chunky high heels and stockings to a gurney !

The Black Order Cometh takes dark eroticism to a whole new level – enticing, seductive and taboo breaking. What's not to like !

Extras include a photo gallery, trailer, promo for the book on which the DVD was based, and two sequences from the Satanic Sluts at the Black Mass – Pole Dancing and Frankenstein. There is also some Redemption trailers.

**Web:** <http://salvation-films.com>

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**Blood Scarab  
Frontline Entertainment  
R1 DVD**

**Web:** <http://www.frontlinefilms.com/>

Blood Scarab opens with a nice tongue in cheek horror introduction, we get a quick historical overview of the life of Countess Elizabeth Bathory and then we are told the rest is speculation. This sets the stage for a rip roaring romp through every possible horror motif from Hammer Horror to scenes reminiscent of the Adam's Family, from "Vampire Lovers" like lesbian scenes to homage's to classic Hollywood Egypt and Mummy films. It is funny, witty, superbly made and above all, lots of fun.

It seems that the Countess Bathory, one of the great beauties of all times was a also little unhinged. She bathed in the blood of virgins to stay young but was having trouble finding the necessary "stock" to keep her bath filled and hence went on search to discover a more economical way to stay young.

She found her answer in an alliance with Count Dracula. Together they now live in a castle in Los Angeles and somehow they have settled into a sort of Adam's Family/Munsters type lifestyle.



However, things are not all that happy, Mrs.Dracula finds herself rather bored and wants to return to the good old days of the Bathories, of which she has lots of fond memories.

These memory sequences are especially impressive with lots of sex, blood and eroticism, they are very nicely done as indeed is the cinematography throughout the whole of blood Scarab.



Disaster strikes as Dracula has been a little too pre-occupied with young girl flesh and while watching his next intended victims, Tanya and Mina, he loses track of time (Renfield being too occupied with bug catching), and is destroyed in classic style by the rising sun.



This time Bathory has had enough, he has been killed once too often ! She is now freed from Dracula cramping her style and decides it is time to whoop it up. There are lots of great scenes of lesbian love, blood drinking and more. Indeed it should be said the lesbian love scenes are highly charged, combined with evocative music, great lighting and superior filming. The soundtrack throughout the film is also superb ranging from classic horror soundtracks to Goth rock and pop.

With a lot of partying and feeding to make up for she is rather annoyed at being only able to feed during the night. She also is a bit wary that Renfield will screw up again, this time on her watch, and that she will end up as "sun dust". So she sets Renfield on the task of discovering the means to achieve immortality during the day.

This leads to a great intersection between vampires, mummies and Egyptian occultism. What a combination !!! It seems the 3000 year-old Mummy of Hor-Shep-Sut has walked out of a local museum and is actually the shell of an ancient lesbian sorceress from Egypt.

This leads to a great Egyptian flashback with all the pomp one would expect from an Egyptian Hollywood scene. It ends with a rather nasty embalming for Hor-She-Sut for seducing the Pharaoh's daughter. After a rather feisty love scene, she is captured, locked in a funerary mask and her heart pulled out and stuffed in a Canopic Jar, her body is left in an unmarked coffin.

A secret ritual unfolds with Renfield at his doddering best, Hor-She-Sut explains to Bathory how she can become immortal in the sunlight. However, as one might expect, two major Goddesses are going to have some girl problems ! As Bathory becomes a Day Walker and Blood Goddess, Hathor steps in for a bitch fight.

This is a great scene – vampire versus mummy, Goddess Vs undead. The climax is suitably fun as Renfield realizes that since crucifixes don't work



then maybe the sacred Egyptian Scarab will and he despatches his evil mistress back to her grave.

Blood Scarab is cracking entertainment. It combines vampires, lesbians, beauty addicts, mummies and Egyptian Goddesses in a way which is a homage to the old world of Hammer Horror and classic Hollywood cinema. It includes motifs and images from so many films, all mixed together in a new and vital way to keep you chuckling, amused and entertained for every second of the film.

The cinematography is excellent; the special effects are cheesy but of high quality and the sets are amazing. This may be a moderate budget film but it has been made to look top notch and is a joy to watch.

The music, mood and texture of the film is great, the actors are all superb ranging from the cackling Renfield to the various menagerie of barely clothed woman.

This is a film you will enjoy again and again, it has everything you need – sex, gore, lesbian love, vampires, mummies, fantasy, Egyptian Gods and more.

It is also packed with special features including a commentary track with director Donald F. Glut and stars Monique T. Parent, Del Howison and Natasha Diakova. An original trailer, a comprehensive making of documentary, deleted dancing handmaidens scene, a theatrical premiere video, interviews, Graveyard Theatre Stars, the Harvey and Bob Show Review, Countess Dracula and Mummy's Kiss Archives and six still galleries.

## Breathing Room Accent Underground R4 DVD

Breathing Room is a thriller which has been clearly influenced by the Saw franchise and other such films as Cube and Battle Royale, even maybe a little bit of Hostel !

Since it has been made on a limited budget, the emphasis is on psychological tension and suspense with solid character development. While the violence shown is strong, it is used primarily for shock value and not overemphasized and I think that this makes Breathing Room more effective than other similar releases.

The plot is fairly straight forward: Tonya (Ailsa Marshall, "The Gilmore Girls," "How I Met Your Mother") awakens naked and disoriented in a warehouse with thirteen strangers. She has an electric collar around her neck and is given a numbered non-descript work uniform. On the wall is a sign reading, "Congratulations! You have been selected! Prepare for the experience of a lifetime!" followed by "Players must follow all the rules to avoid penalty."

The rules are rigidly enforced; it seems an earlier player has been killed simply for forgetting to wash his hands and another play is electrocuted for crossing a line marked "do not cross".

All fourteen of them are unwilling contestants in a competition from which only one of them will survive alive. They have been drugged and kidnapped and none of them have any memory of how they have arrived in the current environment.

As the game progresses each of them find various clues and objects which may be of use. At times they are of limited value as they are incomplete, such as half a key or a gun without bullets. Many of the clues are cryptic and much be deciphered, others are ana-



grams. It seems that many of them are simply important to turn one player against each other and destabilize the group making them distrust each other even further.

As the time comes close for the game to begin a figure appears on the screen and advises the rules - only one of them can survive.

At various intervals the room goes dark and someone ends up dead, it seems someone among them is a killer. As the deaths mount up, the group turn against each other. Using limited resources the film creates a strong mood of paranoia and fear, the darkness of the room is shown in "red light" and this allows us to nearly see what is occurring, but not quite, so we constantly second guess who is the killer.

As the game continues we learn there is a paedophile, rapist and murderer among them and the psychological stress and interpersonal conflicts become just as significant as the murders. There is also an interesting exploration of prejudicial assumptions and some misdirection. It is only right at the end when the sole survivor (who has actually been involved in engineering the game) do you realize some of the real identities of the players.

There is a rather neat little anti climax when a new contestant joins and there is a chance to escape. They team together and use the various items they have on hand - hand, chisel, bullets, alcohol and a lighter to blow a wall apart, but alas, there is still a further game afoot.

The climax of the film is effective and the final revelation of the rapist and the murderer while perhaps a little predictable still works.

The acting is reasonable and while some of the characters are annoying and a little stereotypical - the constant crying and neurosis of some of the female characters seemed a little overdone, generally it worked. At times the limited budget shows, especially in terms of props and the look of the building, it does not distract from the effectiveness of the film. Breathing Room is really quite a clever film which takes elements found in Saw, Cube and Battle Royale and mixes them with a sort of twisted "Reality TV Show feel" to create a suspenseful experience.

By understanding the limitations of his budget and emphasizing mood, character development and plot the director has been able to create a sense of tension throughout the film. Surprisingly, this actually allows the murders to have a much greater effect than in comparable films and this makes Breathing Room a bit more innovative than one would expect. Breathing Room certainly has its moments and succeeds as a taut little thriller.

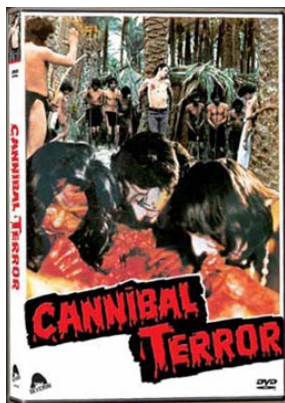




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**Cannibal Terror**  
**Severin Films**  
**R0 NTSC DVD**

Cannibal Terror was one of the original video nasties from the 1980's banned for many years in the UK and denounced as an example of cinematic excess.



To be honest, it is a prime example of a piece of utter Euro trash, terribly acted and with the most ridiculous story twists you may can image, yet it falls into that category of so damn bad its good !

It is just so over the top, so exploitative, so just plain silly that you want to sit right through it just to see where it goes !!

Starring Robert Foster (Inconfessable Orgies of Emmanuelle), Pamela Stanford (White Cannibal Queen) and Burt Altman (the Devil Hunters) this is a quirky Spanish/French co-productions which has a lot to offer include some truly weird dialogue.

It seems a couple of young criminals are having a hard time making enough cash to survive so when their overdressed and oversexed moll bumps into the daughter of a wealthy tycoon they hatch a simple scheme to get rich – they will stage a kidnapping.

However, things don't go to plan, they are not the most intelligent crims on the block and when their contact is hit by a car they are left holding the goods (in this case the kid !). So what do they do ?

They decide they need to hide out in a local jungle which just happens to be the stomping ground for a tribe of cannibals!

What happens if a text book exploitation film, they make it across the border with ominous warnings about cannibals.

Of course, the four wheel drive runs out of water and one of them is brutally killed and eaten and from there on in the action begins...

Okay, the plot is unbelievable and the political incorrectness rampant, however, you cannot overlook the superb excess of what is on offer. Over the top gore and cannibal scenes, gratuitous nudity, some voyeurism and a rape scene and natives who, well, look like refugees from the Eighties.

Why do they have sideburns, rather Euro hairdos (a couple even with a fro) and dance like Westerners ?

Is it only me or are they constantly checking to see if the camera is on them ???

This is cult cannibal madness at its most ridiculous and most entertaining. Severin has done another great job at making available a rare film previous banned in a fully uncut, high definition edition.

**Web:** <http://www.severin-films.com/>

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**The Creek**  
**Anubis Productions**  
**R1 DVD**

A group of close friends decide to spend the weekend out in the middle of the woods in a remote cabin, telling ghost stories and having a good time with a few beers.



They seem to be enjoying themselves until Billy is found bleeding to death in a creek near the cabin. An investigation is undertaken by the local Sheriff's department who writes it off as an accident.

As years pass the friends have lost contact however each of them has an experience which reminds them of the past, they vividly see Billy's ghost. To put his spirit to rest they decide to return together to the cabin for one last time.

At the cabin things go from bad to worse, Billy's ghost appears but rather than appearing as an old friend, seems tortured and angry. His appearance brings back memories of the night and they begin to suspect Billy was murdered. They then realize their cars have been sabotaged and the terror begins.

This is a very low budget film which was made by independent filmmaker Erik Soulliard with the help of family and friends. They raised the funds for the film themselves (except for one investor) and produced it with any studio backing and Erik wrote the script himself.



The crew worked while sustaining everyday jobs and this is clearly an example of where incredible patience and perseverance produces a film which certainly offers more than one would first expect.

The cast is solid and character development realistic, the plot keeps you guessing and sustains a high level of suspense and tension. While certainly not a "slasher" film there are some well done murders which are all pretty brutal. The locations chosen for the filming are superb and really help create the mood which is sustained throughout.

It is pretty amazing to consider this film was made on a budget under \$30,000, it looks impressive and packs a solid punch as an excellent psychological thriller mixed with a ghost story. The ending has a nice twist and I found this is a superb example of what dedicated filmmakers can do with lots of sweat and tears and a small budget.

**Web:** <http://www.thecreekmovie.com>

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**Dante's Inferno  
Ricochet  
TLA Releasing  
R1 DVD**

The Divine Comedy was written by Dante Alighieri between 1308 and his death in 1321 and is still considered today one of the greatest epic poems of all time. While certainly it represents a vision of the world and afterlife as interpreted through the lens of the Medieval Christian Church, many believe it also has a deeper and more allegorical even esoteric interpretation.

In scholarly circles it has been debated whether Dante himself was a member of a minority Christ sect, the Gnostics, and that his focus on Beatrice was a glyph for the divine feminine. Accordingly when reading Dante's Inferno, it is difficult to ascertain whether he actually meant it as an exposition of Medieval Christianity or whether it was actually a subtle means to criticize the power structures around him, or perhaps a mixture of both.

While we can never conclusively answer this question, even the most conservative of scholars have noted the mathematical and numerological patterns encoding his work, his denunciations of Italian politics and his deliberate placement of key figures in various realms of hell. It may be noted that many works that have followed Dante have used his literary structure as means of social criticism and this is especially so today.

While rationalism has essentially demolished the Medieval worldview which underlies Dante's model and the idea of hell is passé, it is a powerful literary framework for the examination of the inequalities of our society and the inherent hypocrisies of modern life.

In this startling work Sandow Birk and his team (Paul Zaloom, Sean Meredith, Elyse Pignolet and others) use an incredible array of hand drawn puppets, miniature sets, animation, CGI, real action and even a Victorian theatre to adapt Dante for the post modern world.

This is a startling and original work which is dark, sarcastic and cynical.

Dante is a no-hoper and slacker and his experience of this world and the next comes with a sneering tone which makes him both easy to relate to and somewhat unlikable at the same time.

The realms of Hell are superbly presented and used not only as social criticism but to offer commentary on everything from current world events to religious hypocrisy and all manner of social inequities. In many ways Dante's Inferno is turned on its head as the portrayal of the very categories of Hell emphasize the obviously ludicrous nature of the structure while at the same time sustaining the hierarchy of the original work.

The section on gays in hell is especially poignant and pokes fun at both the superficiality of some aspects of the gay lifestyle (eternal dancing!) and the Churches prejudice.

This balance between political incorrectness and biting social commentary is impressive. Just as Dante places relevant figures in hell, so Birk has done much the same even using institutions such as Fox News to represent the great liar. I especially like that Dick Cheney is so evil he is already dead and in hell even though his shell walks the earth !

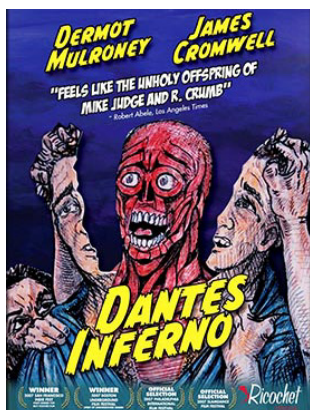


Illustration by Gustave Dore





This is a brooding, melancholic work, beautifully animated with painstaking detail. It is hard to image just how long such a work took to make.

The number of puppets, backgrounds, miniatures, animations and live action sequences are overwhelming, every scene seems to have layers and layers of detail and texture. Virgil is voiced by Kames Cromwell (of Six Feet Under) who is just perfect for the part and Dermot Mulroney has a suitably devil may care attitude.

There is so much to admire in this bizarre journey, from the perversities of Hell's sexual shenanigans to the nearly comical nature of Satan himself and the Dante and Virgil having to return to the real world via his rear passage.

The whole film is irreverent and funny yet at the same time poignant and meaningful. This is a great way to read Dante !

Extras on this DVD are also a real plus, these range from two very comprehensive commentaries covering puppetry, animation and the history of Dante to a Making Of Featurette, Trailers, a photo gallery and DVD-Rom content which includes two mp3 tracks.

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**Dark City**  
**Directors Cut**  
**Alex Proyas**  
**R4 DVD**  
**Reel DVD**

Dark City is considered by many to be the best Science Fiction of the Nineties, it has been compared with Blade Runner from the decade before and still offers a stunning visual experience mixed with a startlingly original plot and an avalanche of Science Fiction themes and motifs.

At the time it was released it was somewhat of a "slow mover", in many ways it suffered the same release problems as Blade Runner. One could even call it the "Blade Runner Syndrome" !

It was savaged by the critics and ignored by audiences. I think the truth of the matter was that it was

too intellectual for the market of the period and this has been proven by the fact that over time it slowly began to develop a cult following and is now is considered a major classic with a major following.



It is always compared to The Matrix and perhaps it is a fair comparison because they both cover similar themes. However, Dark City was released before the Matrix and explored much of the territory in a far more serious manner. While the first Matrix film has similar Gnostic themes it was far more action based and seemed to lack texture and mood. It is very hard to fault the dark Noir of Dark City especially considering this has come from the man who made The Crow.

It is also fair to say that as the Matrix went into its first sequel, The Matrix Reloaded, it went into action overdrive with way too much style and way too little substance and then went right off the rails with Matrix Revolutions.

It could be critically suggested that the Matrix succeeded where Dark City failed due to marketing strategies rather than quality.

The Matrix was carefully marketed with Anime packages (The Animatrix), new agers and transpersonal psychologists sprouting its virtues and such big budget special effects that nothing could match.

But when you strip away the hype, Neo is a new age type of "John" from Dark City and the ideas are far less textured and refined than in Dark City. I must admit the tribal, new age rubbish that the Matrix ended up using to sell its two sequels certainly left me cold, even if the films were interesting.

Under the surface of Dark City is all manner of philosophical speculation and religious exploration.





It is clearly strongly influenced by Gnostic thought, a heretical Christian tradition, which taught that Archons manipulated man for their own ends. The process of changing memories every night and the constant change of roles has a strong “reincarnation” motif and John becoming the super-human who can now use the machine against the “Archons” obviously has both a Buddha and Christ resonance.

Evolutionary philosophical thought has also strongly influenced the film with not only the reincarnation concept but that “John” is evolving towards the next stage of post human evolution and hence becomes a Overman or Superman (this also has resonance with the German philosopher Nietzsche).

At the same time, the fact that the aliens envy man and try to become human is also found throughout religious myth and legend.

This concept of the god becoming human (or trying to) is the basis of the vast number of avatar or incarnation myths found everywhere from ancient Egypt through India to Christianity. However in this telling the gods (read aliens) are either negative (as seen with the Gnostics) or capricious (a bit like the Greek or Roman deities).

This edition of Dark City is a refined director’s cut. There are so many “Director’s Cuts” on the market of films these days that I become a bit dubious. Too often it seems to be the idea to add every bit of foot-

age you can find and pad the film to an insane level or worse change the whole drift of a classic film.

Was Decker a replicate ? Who Really knows ????? Even more over the top is reworking films altogether totally redoing special effects until you have a new version of an old film. Now, personally it is not my place to tell a director what to do with their film, however, out of respect for their fans I do think it would be reasonable to always make available various editions, especially if the film is considered of classic value. So, for example, with Blade Runner, while the new version has many detractors, at least it is part of a package and you can watch the various versions and decide what you like.

With Dark City Proyas has taken a conservative approach and allowed what is a unique film to stand the test of time and I think this was the right decision. While it certainly was a CGI intense film at the time, he has basically only tweaked here and there and added a few scenes and extended character dialogues to enhance the plot and produce a better texture to the experience.

Other changes were more subtle but nevertheless significant, for example, Proyas re-composited the distortion effect that occurs when John uses his mind power and a few other subtle changes were made in a similar vein.

The sound remix is a major improvement, adding a much better audio experience with some great surround effects, mood music and environmental sounds.

The extras are also worth noting. Memories of Shell Beach is solid 40 minute look at all the key elements of Dark City. Alex Proyas and writer Lem Dobbs discuss the beginnings of the story and how they worked together to improve it in conjunction with David Goyer who worked on revisions of the script.

Also explored are the styles of the film, the use of models and special effects and the strange reaction from critics and audiences on first release.

Another major documentary is the Architecture of Dreams—a 30 minute collection of short visual essays exploring the many philosophical ideas behind Dark City.

Also included are three commentaries, a personal introduction by Alex Proyas and a production gallery with well over 80 photos and images.

A pretty good offering to say the least !

Dark City The Directors Cut is an excellent edition with a new high quality print, great sound, an excellent editors cut and some superb extras !



**Dead in Three Days  
Madman  
Entertainment  
R4 DVD**

Dead in Three Days (In 3 Tagen bist du tot) is marketed as "Austria's first horror" film and it certainly packs a very nice and even nasty punch.

The first section of the film builds a firm foundation of ordinariness filled with the lives of a group of friends. There is a leisure in these early scenes not often seen in Hollywood productions. It takes its time setting the stage, allowing us to connect to the various actors and their lives. This level of character development is important because it helps increase the tension and suspense which explodes later in the film.

During the early section of the film are lots of everyday concerns, love, parties and music. Indeed, there is lots of music, the use of various types of music from edgy rock to classic pace the film well and really helps create the ambient mood of the various scenes.

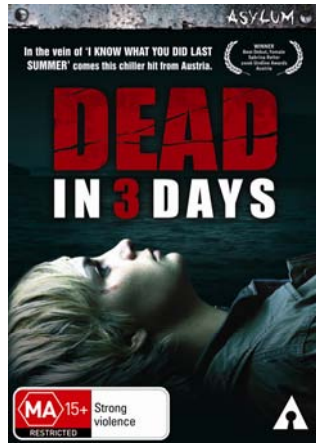
The build-up of their everyday lives creates a great background but with occasional "dark hints and suggestions". These range from a simple change in music, a strange look and or more directly, accidentally killing an animal in their car after graduation.

We also get some great misdirection with Pat, a loner wishing to join their cliché, constantly watching them from a distance, menacing or just isolated we are unsure. He seems disturbed, but how can we be sure?

After a graduation party, Martin goes missing and they all realize they have received a text message saying "dead in three days". They have no comprehension of what it means and the police are less than helpful. It seems like a threat, but why three days?

The fairly ineffective local police and detectives form an interesting backdrop throughout the film – it could have easily become a procedural cop film, but it avoids this by focusing on the various victims rather than the investigation, indeed the police play a very minor role in the film altogether.

The first killing (that of Martin) is extremely well filmed, it focuses intently on the imagery of water, which becomes more and more significant as the plot unfolds. The slow drowning is compelling and is an example of excellent cinematography.



As you look back at the film later, you realize how important images of water really are, ranging from slow pans across the surfaces on lakes to reflective surfaces and dripping taps.

All of these techniques help add a unique feel to the film, it has a great mood and a unique European look which is nice in these days of bland "Hollywood" environments where everything looks the same.

Throughout Dead in Three Days there is an emphasis on high quality filmmaking, using shadows and light, sounds and textures to create a superb mood. Certainly there are some great shocks and solid violence, but these are in context and the "gore and guts" factor is kept in check by an emphasis on storytelling.

Misdirection is used to quite an effect and as we realize Pat is not the killer, we wonder what the background story really is. This leads to central motif of the film which is a terrible childhood mistake that comes back to haunt them all.

Now certainly this is not new and is perhaps a bit predictable, but the style of the film, the solid character development, the beautiful cinematography and the use of the evocative landscapes make this a superior film.

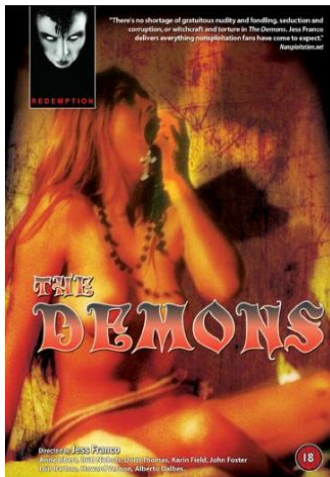
The climatic scenes in the old broken down house and the final revelation of the killer is a nice shock followed by some excellent action and a sad and melancholic flashback about the events that led to what has occurred.

I especially like the way in which the killer is portrayed as a sad, grief ridden and broken character who is driven to the edges of sanity to seek revenge.

Rather than being a two dimensional monster she is a broken human character with which you may even sympathize, well, maybe a little, perhaps....

## The Demons Jess Franco Redemption 2008 ALL REGION

The Demons (Les Démons) is Jess Franco's take on Ken Russell's The Devils and it is certainly is a startling and original work. It is sometimes seen as a sequel to Franco's 1969 witch and sex melodrama 'The Bloody Judge' which starred none other than Christopher Lee !



Franco is a prolific filmmaker with an estimated 180 films under his belt; some have achieved quite a measure of success such as Vampyros Lesbos and 99 Women, which is still considered one of the best "women in prison" movies.

Most of his works fall into the category of sexploitation and are marvellous celebrations of sex, violence and transgression. While it has sometimes proved difficult for Franco to find the funding necessary for his films and quality varies greatly, it can be said that The Demons is one of his better works and a celebration of everything Franco stands for - Eurotrash at its very best.

A witch burned at the stake by the inquisition doesn't go quietly, engulfed by flames, she curses her accusers, Lord Jeffreys (Cihangir Gaffari), Lady de Winter (Karin Field) and her lover Renfield (Alberto Dalbes). She proclaims to all that her daughters will help fulfil the curse. Suitably alarmed, Lady de Winter sets out with Renfield to find the girls, Margaret (Britt Nichols) and Kathleen (Anne Libert). Believing they may be in a local convent they confirm with Mother Superior Rosalinda that there are indeed two nuns Margaret and Kathleen that could be the descendants they are looking for.

As one would expect in such a tale, one (Margaret)



is believed to be chaste and pure whilst the other (Kathleen) is haunted by dreams of running naked in the forest and being one with nature, naturally this is seen as proof that she is league with the devil.

After Lady de Wynter does a rather lurid inspection to make sure they are virgins, she declares Kathleen may indeed be a witch and takes her back to her castle to be tested for sorcery. Here she is tortured to verify her feisty union with Satan. However, all is not lost, it seems Lady De Wynter's husband has taken a liking to her and due to an intervention by a member of the household she is let escape.

At the convent Margaret has a visit from her dead mother demanding vengeance for her death. Margaret for some reason instantly forgets her vows as a nun and as well as her purity and agrees. She now has wild sexual congress with a rather dapper Satan figure and gets the powers of a sorceress to boot !!

Of course, she loses her marbles and transforms from chaste nun to nymphomaniac, writhing in uncontrolled sexual frenzy she seduces poor old Mother Rosalinda who just can't cope with all these lusty feelings and jumps of a balcony !

While all hell is breaking loose in the nunnery, Kathleen has escaped into the arms of a local painter. But this doesn't last long as she is again captured, this time after an affair with Renfield. Kathleen and Margaret certainly seems to get a lot of action in this film !

As a political sub plot unfolds and plans are afoot for an invasion by William of Orange, Margaret poses as a Spanish maid and gets inside the De Wynter household. Margaret also has the powers of a sorceress and can turn people into skeletons, so sex, sorcery and politics come together in a powerful climax. Sad to say, Kathleen betrays her sister and Kathleen dies like her mother at the stake, but not before taking Lord Jeffreys with her.







The Demons is quite an experience, filled to the brim with sex, sorcery, lesbianism and acts of wanton cruelty and violence, it is Eurotrash cinema at its most delectable. As per normal Franco practice, the camera focuses in on every curve and every welt and there is certainly lots of flesh on show.

Like with all Jess Franco films, the acting is, well, a little wooden and the editing on the eccentric side. The dialogue is mostly in English with occasional lapses into French but since we are not getting the short 70 minute cut edition this is a small price to say and since Franco has a very visual style it really doesn't affect the story flow.

The soundtrack is rather fun, filled with jazzy drums, flutes and explosions of rock and metal, it is so out of whack with a 16th century witch tale that it makes The Demons even more of a cult classic.

It is great to see this edition released by Redemption and it offers everything one would expect from a Jess Franco classic !

Web: <http://www.salvation-films.com>

**The Devil's Muse  
Deluxe 2 Disc Set  
Halo Eight  
R0 ALL REGION DVD**

The Devil's Muse is an unusually creative film which is both surreal and erotic, violent and brazen. It has a strong art-house feel and while on some level offers a linear plot at the same time seems primarily concerned with telling a story via images, symbols and music. The film uses the historical story of the death of the Black Dahlia to explore the decaying effect Hollywood has on women as they try and gain the success they so desire.

The film opens on January 15, 1947, with a compelling portrayal of the discovery of Elizabeth Short's (known as the Black Dahlia) mutilated body. The film has been made to look old and damaged and the voice over is of the Black Dahlia describing the



scene in the third person. We then cut to the present with a highly erotically charged scene which ends in bloodshed and a police investigation. This first murder which is played out to the song "Pulling Your Insides Out" by Jill Tracy is a superbly edgy mix of eroticism and violence.

The film then focuses in on a beautiful young actress Lisa Small (Kristen Kerr of David Lynch's Inland Empire) who is cast as The Black Dahlia in a film about Hollywood's most famous unsolved murder. She is also obsessed with the Black Dahlia killing and has turned her room into a shrine to Elizabeth Short.

However, things begin to unravel as she finds herself experiencing a dream world around her which starts to envelop her life. As the same time as the 60th anniversary of the original killing comes near, a copycat killer is murdering local women. As her dream like world becomes more and more disturbed, she cannot tell reality from nightmare and the killer is coming close. It seems that as these worlds intersect she is starting to live out the last days of the life of the Black Dahlia.

The Devil's Muse has various levels of plot and these intersect in strange and unusual ways, it is a not a film to try and fathom cognitively, it is a film layered with symbols, images and motifs which must be experienced, in many ways on an emotional level. On one level we have the story of the historical Black Dahlia, on another the tale of a filmmaker making a film about the murder, on another we have the inner dream world of the actress who is playing the Black Dahlia role and is maybe even Elizabeth Short's reincarnation. At the same time we have a detective tale about a copycat killer and a symbolic exploration of the effect Hollywood has on young actresses are they are driven to do anything to survive.

It is quite a complex plot and has been rather masterfully written and the editing of the film actually works to bring these all together at the climax of the film !

The acting in the Devil's Muse varies in quality with Kristen Kerr (playing Lisa Small) being especially impressive. It also features appearances from Trent Hagga (Gimie Skelter, Bonnie and Clyde Vs. Dracula), Mark Borchardt (American Movie, Cabin Fever



2), Julie Strain (Heavy Metal 2000), Masumi Max, and Lloyd Kaufman (Director of The Toxic Avenger, Poultrygeist).

The cinematography of the Devil's Muse is dark and evocative; with a lot of its expression via images and symbols and it has some very moving as well as savage moments.

One of the most outstanding aspects of the film is the music, ranging from superb songs through to ambient and moody electronic to jazz. It is quite superb and it is marvellous to note that the soundtrack is included on disc two of the package and what a package this is.

On the first Disc we get the unrated directors cut of the film David J (Bauhaus. Love and Rockets) live concert of music from the film, "Black Dahlia: The Making of The Devil's Muse" featurette, trailers, Interview with Mary Pacios (childhood friend of The Black Dahlia who went on to write a definitive investigative book on the murder), Deleted scenes, Music videos and a "Message from Ramzi Abed" featurette.

The second disc is the original motion picture soundtrack of 11 songs composed by David J and Ego Plum with special guests Nora Keyes, Abby Travis, Johnny Dowd, Mr. Uncertain, Creekbird, and Joyce Rooks (Sound Engineer/Co-Producer John Neff on title song).

The Devil's Muse is an impressive art-film which has a strong film noir feel mixed with a surreal cinematography and a startling and times even beautiful soundtrack. It takes the death of the Black Dahlia as a jumping off point to explore all manner of ideas and is a film you will want to watch a number of times to get the most from it.

**Web:** <http://www.blackdahliamovie.com/>

### **Eel Girl** **Paul Champion** **6 minute short**

Eel Girl is a very short film but this does not underplay its effectiveness. It is dark, moody and has strong erotic overtones.



In a military laboratory, a scientist has become obsessed with the half-human half-eel creature he's studying. When she beckons him to her, it's the call of a siren, his hormones are raging, he cannot resist her call and the results are dire.

The CGI, special effects and make up are utterly convincing. I am not surprised to learn that the

makeup for the eel girl took four makeup artists nearly four hours to apply, and Weta Workshop needed over 45 gallons of black methocyl, the thick black liquid to fill the eel girl's strange bathtub. Indeed, this short ended up using some thirty seven visual effects shots to create what is quite an arresting short.

Yes, it is only six minutes long and at present waits to be released on a compilation DVD, but it is compelling viewing and certainly worth watching.

**Web:** <http://www.eelgirl.net>

### **File 0529** **James Lockhart** **15 Minute Short**

File 0529 is a intriguing short film revisiting the Jekyll and Hyde tale by placing in a futuristic time and setting it in a non descript military base.



Dr. Victor Stevenson is a brilliant yet emotionally unstable scientist whose one desire is to fulfill his uncles dream of making a serum to eliminate human aggression.

After the death of a test subject and under the duress of failed experiments, he accidentally ingests the serum himself with dire results.

File 0529 is fifteen minutes in length but offers an effective evocation of the tale in that period. It is in black and white with the use of spot colour when showing the liquid which causes the transformation.

It illustrates a superior use of light, shadow and editing to create a moody and textured piece of cinema.

There are some memorable "focus pieces", for example, the shot of the filing cabinet, isolated in the middle of the screen illuminated by a single light.

The music creates a good mood and ranges from dark ambient through to stronger electro/rock at the more intense moments. The special effects used while obviously created on a low budget are surprisingly innovative and successful.

File 0529 is an interesting and engaging short and considering it was made on \$1,000 and with a small 20 person crew is nothing short of amazing.

I can't imagine what this filmmaker could create on a real budget and I greatly look forward to what he produces next.

**Web:** <http://www.myspace.com/file0529>



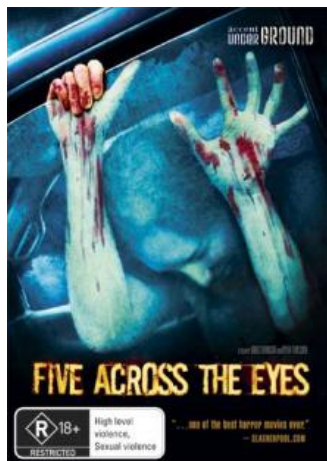
## Five Across the Eyes Accent Underground R4 DVD

Five Across the Eyes is a visceral and brutal experience. Shot with deliberately grainy and raw footage, we see the world through the eyes of five teen girls trying to make it home after a football match before their curfew. They may not be likable, but they are very "real" – the acting is very impressive. They take a shortcut and end up lost on a myriad of back roads. They stop at a store to get directions but they accidentally clip a parked vehicle, so they hit reverse and tail it out of there. As they make it down the road into a region the local call "the Eyes" they are chased by a SUV and this is where it gets nasty. Up til now it would be too easy to simply see Five Across the Eyes as another girls lost in country flick, there are a lot of them these days and most seem to revel in violence over content. To be honest considering the look of the film at the start it would be easy to give up, however, if you stick with it, as I did, you will be suitably surprised.

A woman in a suit armed with a rifle, forces them out of the car, makes them strip, degrades them and makes them urinate on their clothes. This is a disturbing scene which is brutal and powerful. The low budget of the film and grainy filming only increases the power of the footage; it is as though we are watching a news report or surveillance footage. The woman is clearly unhinged and after a range of debasements, she leaves them abused and shaken, but that is just the beginning.

The film now moves into a road chase where the girls are hunted down by their unnamed assailant, who rams the car and pushes them to faster and faster speeds. The girls speed, swerve and throw things out the window. As the chase accelerates, it is surprisingly how much a film with a very low budget can get hook you in, you are on the edge of your seat as their cars speeds through near darkness, lurching from side to side with the claustrophobic feeling of being inside sharing the terror of the occupants.

Five Across the Eyes offers a very unpolished portrayal of violence with urination, vomit, bruises and bloody faces – mixed with constant yelling, screaming and crying, it pulls no punches yet avoids reveling. Analysing the film after watching it, I realized that most of the tension is actually created by the emotions of the girls than by the actual portrayal of violence, an excellent means of using suggestion to infer more than you actually show.



In many ways the film works by focusing on the psychological stress the girls are experiencing rather than the violence, sure there are violent scenes but these are generally less than most other films in a similar vein these days and are always in the context of the film as a whole.

The ending is suitably intense and while revenge may be sweet, one may debate where the girls have been reduced by the experience. The final scene which explains that the woman had slaughtered everyone at the dinner where it all began seems rather "ad hoc" and leaves me less than impressed. It is as though there was some sort of need to justify the girl's response and I felt that it diminished the climax of the film.

That being said, Five Across the Eyes is an impressive low budget film from first time filmmakers. It achieves a sense of menace and psychological horror which is more powerful than films with ten times the budget. By understanding their limited budget and using innovative cinematic techniques, emotion and dialogue over gore and mood and tension over one off shocks they have created a very effective thriller.

Web: <http://www.myflix.com.au>

## Frankenstein's Bloody Nightmare Unearthed Films R1 DVD

Victor Karlstein III is the head of a highly respected hospital, a doctor with a great career and a solid reputation. However, when his girlfriend dies under his care, the power of his loss leads to an obsession, the need for her to live again. While he succeeds in his task, she is certainly no longer what she was, transformed into a beast she requires a regular intake of fresh body parts to continue living.

Producer-director John R. Hand has produced a strange and surreal film. Shot on Super 8 and Digital Video, the film has a deliberately grainy and first-hand look which gives it an immediacy of expression. Hand uses a variety of styles, cinematic flourishes and techniques to create an uneasy and moody aesthetic. It has a strong and power electronic even industrial soundtrack by "The Grays" which helps drive the imagery of the film. There is an innovative use of light and shadow so that even simple objects are presented in a way to infer the content of the story. The violence is surreal and the general film presentation disorienting so the intensity of the experience is more than you would first consider.





Certainly it takes a while to get used to the unusual style, but once you settle down and allow yourself to experience the story in a new way, it is an intriguing ride.

While this is certainly at the “experimental” end of the film spectrum, it is a creative exploration of the Frankenstein story in a non-linear way. It uses various cinematic styles, textures, mood and sound to create a series of images which infer and conjure the content rather than just telling the story and hence ends up being a rather haunting and imaginative work.

#### Also see

**Web:** <http://www.pulsingcinema.com/JRHFilms/>

#### **Frontier(s)** **Madman Entertainment** **2008** **R4 DVD**

Frontier is an impressive French horror which really shows what can be done with a new perspective of an old classic horror storyline.

In many ways Frontier is a classic outback killing film with inbred country dwellers who run a bed and breakfast from hell.



However, the quality of the filming, the unique political background and the ultra violence take this film way beyond a lot that has been done before.

The use of a strong philosophical and political backdrop to the film also helps create a mood which is potent and actually rather meaningful.

The film opens with footage of riots taking place throughout Paris. These are clearly race riots and show the very current clash between the various immigrant groups and the rising trend towards the right in Europe.

This footage is lengthy and is set to a great sound-

track, it creates atmosphere well and sets the stage for the film and this theme of the right versus left and issues of race and prejudice continue throughout the film.

France is now run by a right wing government and after some sort of bank robbery Yasmine, Alex, Tom and Farid need to get out of the city quick. One of their number has been shot and while trying to hole up in the city they decide to take him to a local hospital. He dies in emergency and they are forced to flee. Now, they are clearly at risk of being caught and need to leave Paris immediately.

Tom and Farid leave town first and end up at an isolated inn, strangely there is no cost for the room and the two women who run it seem to be more interested in having a good time, a very good time.

But there is menace in the air, the cinematography of the countryside emphasizes its isolation and the dialogue between Tom and Farid make it clear they are more at home in the housing estates of Paris than in the countryside.

Tom has a good time with the woman but the “family dinner” goes terribly wrong when Farid refuses to eat the pork and Grannie is rather brutally force-fed her dinner.

Goetz, the girls older brother arrives and in a powerful scene packed with racial abuse and violence attacks them both, they manage to escape and drive away, but not for long, they are run off the road into a pit that leads to some underground tunnels which lead to a local mine.

To escape the burning car they have to climb through tunnels deep into the mine, the filming here is breathtaking, it is nightmarishly claustrophobic with a superb use of limited lighting you really feel you are crawling through the tunnels with the injured Tom and Farid.

This scene opens the way for the ultra violence and savagery which makes up the rest of the film. Alex and Yasmine arrive and are told their friends are at another inn down the road.







When they arrive the whole story unfolds, it seems that an escaped Nazi simply known Father, runs the local area and has spend his time since the war trying to restore his families bloodline.

This seems to include using every and any available tourist either as breeding stock or as food. The Nazi character is suitably deranged, pathological and violent and the film descends into all manner of torture and mayhem. This is not for the squeamish.

The use of a film camera by Farid offers a direct first person feel to his experience of what is occurring and this only reinforces his alienation from the violence around him. He is a city dweller watching the countryside and its people through a camera and he cannot fathom what is occurring and why.

The film itself also uses a number of key cinematic methods which make it all the more effective. There are long shots showing the isolation and loneliness of the countryside, intense bursts of violence, "hunting" scenes which use fast editing and intense music to jar the audience and strange family scenes of perverse patriotism (and religious symbolism) which emphasise the madness of the Nazi family.

This is an intense and confronting film with some truly strange subplots ranging from incestuous breeding to inbred cannibal children.

The plot is far more "mature" than a lot of horror films with the rivalry and family dynamics being quite believable, the acting truly impressive and the background in racial riots and the fear of the far right in Europe being all too real.

The climatic ending is superb with a series of violence climaxes and anti climaxes, knives, guns, hand to hand and explosions leading to an utter bloodbath.

This is certainly a brutal film but one which has more than enough by the way of plot, character and cinematography to make it a very memorable horror experience.

## **The Gay Bed and Breakfast of Terror** **MoDean Films**

**Web:** <http://www.gaybedandbreakfastofterror.com/>

The Gay Bed and Breakfast of Terror opens with an original music number "Beware of the Straights" and you start to realize this is going to be a very original viewing experience. This is a film where all the conventions of the "traditional" horror genre are turned on their head. Instead of the old country hotel, languishing in a state of decay and disrepair where a group of young randy heterosexual teens are killed by a sexually ambiguous murderer (sometimes gay, other times "gender variant" such as in Psycho), we as treated to the reverse. On the eve of the Blue party, one of the most significant gay events on the calendar, five couples having not made bookings on time, have had to find whatever accommodation they can and they all find themselves at the Sahara Salvation Inn, supposedly a small slice of paradise in the desert. When they arrive they find a decaying and rotting old building with very strange occupants.

The five couples are as diverse as can be. There is Dom and Alex, the 'performers' (Vinny Markus and Michael Soldier) and Deborah and Gabby, the sophisticated, entrepreneurial lipstick dykes (Shannon Lee and Denise Heller). There's Mike and Eric, the upper income sweater wearing power couple (Derek Long and Robert Borzych) and their annoying rather caricatured fag-hag friend, Lizette (Lisa Block-Wieser). Also checking in are Starr and Brenda, the struggling and perhaps rather self deluded folk singer and her tough-talking tomboy (Hilary Schwartz and Mile Rivenbark) and lastly Rodney and Todd, the sugar daddy and his pretty boy or personal trainer, depending on how you look at it. (Jim Polivka and James Tolins).

As they settle in they are welcomed by Helen (Mari Marks), a rather God fearing woman, who seems very out of place running a gay B & B and Luella (Georgia Jean), her daughter who seems to have an interest in the ladies her mother doesn't appreciate. As they are served mincemeat muffins one of the guests bites into an earring, they begin to think something is not quite right.

This is a very creative and innovate work of cinema which seems to cross genres between comedy and horror, gore and black humor. The way in which the traditional stereotypes of horror cinema are reversed is both amusing and yet convincing at the same time. Sure, this may be high camp but there is a seriousness in the film that all works exceptionally well.

The couples all have their own hang-ups, problems and difficulties and this honest portrayal of a world in which, for once, the gay world is the majority one is a nice change from those sweaty heterosexual teen horror flicks. At the same time the portrayal of the mad fundamentalist Christian mother is so revolting that while it amuses there is a real sense of horror in her performance as well. Certainly Manfred her vio-

lent monstrous child is a surprisingly effective monster.

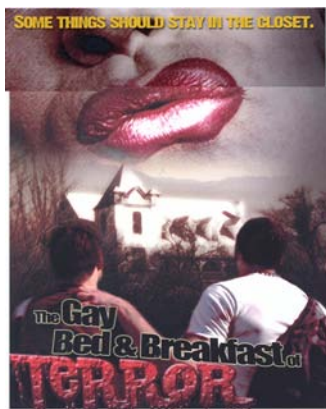
In many ways the film swings between black humor and horror, suspense, gore and high camp and this roller coaster ride makes it a very entertaining experience. There are also some nice “hot scenes” as well with some hunky men and sweaty action.

This film, of course, has resonances with so many horror classics, ranging from psycho to Nightmare on Elm Street. Here Manfred, the mad bastard child, has been born from the seed of a hundred Republicans gang banging at a convention ! While there is lots of humor, the gore and violence is high and there is a solid “psycho family” story here too with hints of the Texas Chainsaw Massacre or even “The Hills have Eyes”.

The exploration of prejudice, bigotry and narrowness is pointed but not polemical, it is a horror comedy of the darkest sort which allows its superior plotting, acting and gore to tell the story without hitting you over the head. There is also a lot of mood created in the details, ranging from an altar to George Bush and Christian fundamentalists to the sprouting of Old Testament phrases. It would have been too easy for this to end with the demonization of the mad straight Christian woman and certainly, considering how most fundamentalists behave, it would have been more than deserved.

However, there is a bite in the tail, the drag queen and young folk singer become just as mad as Helen and Luella and take their places looking after Manfred and preparing for new guests. If there is a true evil in the film, it is the insane superstitious beliefs which seem to infect both Helen and Luella and even get to the others in the end...

The Gay Bed and Breakfast of Terror is a superb scary, fun romp with moments of true terror, lots of laugh and some truly memorable hard to forget scenes !



## Gay Zombie Michael Simon 20 Minute Short

The motif of the Zombie in folklore, literature and film has had a very long history, ranging from Haitian Voodoo to revenants in Medieval folklore through to classic horror tales and the violent cannibalistic flesh eaters of modern films ranging from Dawn of the Dead to Shaun of the Dead. The imagery of the zombie also seems to have a certain pattern and symbolic resonance. The Zombie being dead, is outside normal human restrictions and hence in a sense, more in contact with its bodily functions without the constraints of psychological and emotional restrictions. Accordingly, it is seen that the Zombie divorced from life, has a more insightful perception of the human condition – they can be interpreted as representations of the ultimate “Outsider”.

This approach has particular significance when related to issues regarding sexuality. The Gay Zombie while only a 20 minute short, intelligently juxtaposes the difficulties of coming to terms with one's sexuality with the nature of being undead. This is not only amusing but quite poignant – Miles may be able to accept he eats flesh but not that he is gay. (The humour play on concepts and words is also quite relevant).

As the plot unfolds various subtexts are also explored including acceptance of diversity within the gay community and the nature of love and friendship. There is lots of good natured humour (I love Zombie make over) and great acting. The look of Miles is superb, not too much or too little make-up and hence he is both appealing and disturbing at the same time. The balance struck between horror, dark humour and pathos is well managed and the reflective ending reminding us of the importance of getting the most from life is a nice touch. Gay Zombie has been a selection at over sixty official movie festivals worldwide and is definitely worth seeing.

Web: <http://www.gayzombie.net>





**The Gruesome Twosome**  
**Singa Home Entertainment**  
**R1 DVD**



In 1963 Herschell Gordon Lewis, an underground filmmaker best known for making midnite movie "nudie-cutie" films, changed the face of American cinema forever when he released "Blood Feast." Blood Feast is still considered the first ever gore film and while low budget was a tremendous success. Drive-ins were booked out with patrons waiting around the block and the critics reacted with disgust– the splatter film was born!

Lewis continued with such other cult classics as "2000 Maniacs" and "The Wizard of Gore", both of which have been recently remade. He also made the controversial sex and gore film "The Gore Gore Girls", a film which is still banned in Australia and was recently once again refused classification for release.

The Gruesome Twosome is one of the less successful of Lewis' gore films but still strange and unusual enough to be of interest.

It seems Mrs.Pringle, her mentally defective son Rodney, and her stuffed cat Napoleon run a business selling wings out of an old dilapidated house. The problem is that their business is going rather well and they are running out of product. Mrs.Pringle hits on a way to solve her dilemma, since there are lots of university students in the area so she runs an advert for a room to rent. But she does not aim to give her guests accommodation for long.

When they arrive they do not even get time to settle in before they are locked in a room where her disturbed son disposes of them with some brutality using everything he can find including an electric carving knife. Of course, one too many students go missing and an investigation begins. Kathy works at the local university and is determined to figure out why her classmates are missing, much to boyfriend Dave's irritation. When her friend Dawn disappears, Kathy gets close to the truth as she begins investigating "The Gruesome Twosome".

The Gruesome Twosome is an entertaining cult and gore classic which while clearly a product of its time, it was made in 1967, still packs a punch. It has some quite astounding gore "set pieces" and a rather over the top story line. Yes, the acting is pretty average and the film seems a bit padded here and there – the opening sequence is a tad ridiculous.

However, as a work of horror cult history it is well worth seeing.

**Web:** <http://www.singahe.com>

# the HALFWAY HOUSE

**The Halfway House**  
**Unrated Edition**  
**BV Entertainment**  
**R1 DVD**

The Halfway House is superb Schlock cinema, it is a mix of a Cthulhu Mythos story of the Old Gods, 1950's science fiction, a dose of a horror and, of course, girls in reform school exploitation. It is lurid, witty and great entertainment.

A girl gets kidnapped by a robed figure while jogging and not getting any answers from the police her sister decides to investigate for herself. Since some five girls have also gone missing, all from the local "Mary Magdalene" Halfway house, she goes undercover with the help of a young policemen, who she has conveniently seduced !

The seduction of the young policemen is the beginning of the wallops of sex in this steamy film; every girl seems to get her gear off at least once. There seems to be a constant flow of tits, butts and taking off clothes...

There are lots of girl on girl scenes (one with some





very creative Vaseline use), a near rape with a plaster Madonna and a punk love scene where someone loses his head (literally).

There is a pervert watching the girls in the showers and a priest smacking their naked backsides with a Jesus studded paddle and more.

The halfway house is the classic vehicle for a "reform school", "woman in prison" sexploitation plot and it is every bit as lurid as one would hope. The house is run by a priest who likes to give out spankings and keeps all manner of whips in his closet as well as a blow up doll. There is a perverse handyman called Lutkus who wouldn't be out of place in any classic Frankenstein film and Sister Cecilia is superbly bitchy, vicious and obnoxious. All the elements are there to make this a real classic.

As the story unfolds we come to understand that Sister Cecilia had been gang raped by thirteen boys at the last school at which she taught and put out to pasture. She retired in Arkham where she meet Lutkus and together they stole the "Necronomicon" from the Miskatonic University with the sole aim of evoking the Old Gods. It seems she wants revenge on all men and aims to be the mother of an alien race by mating with a one eyed creature from another dimension !

To put her plan in practise she has returned to work at the "St.Magdalene Halfway House for Girls" and is keeping the beastie in the basement. However, he needs to be fed and girls just keeping going missing...



There is everything one would hope for in sleazy, outrageous and sacrilegious cult cinema. Kenneth J. Hall was creator of the Puppet Master series and this shows in the creature, it is a real homage to 1950's Sci Fi monsters and just looks awesome.

It is the ultimate giant one eyed monster with a taste for young nubile flesh ! It is so B grade, so Schlock it is gorgeous. To be honest, I wish it was released as a collectible so I could have one !

It is amazing to know that this was not some sort of CGI creation but was actually built full size. The head alone was around eight foot across and each tentacles was 14 foot long and six or seven puppeteers for every shot. This is some mean puppet !

The acting is superb and the character development is damn good, there is a homage to early "woman in prison" films so you get the tough dyke, the tender young lesbian (Cherry Pie is her name!), the violent Latino Girl and so on. The "reform" school scenes are just so cool. The catfights, clashes and girl bitch attitudes fit the film so well.

On top you have the delicious look of the "cult sequences". Sister Cecilia transformed into a "Priestess of the Old Gods" with a young girl stripped semi naked spread-eagled on a large disc ready to be devoured by a one eye monster, it is just too good to be true.





I have always adored Mary Woronov, every since seeing her in Eating Raoul and Rock and Roll High School - she has such a commanding presence and as Sister Cecilia come "Old God" Priestess she is nothing short of spectacular. She embodies the venomous old Nun who is not what she seems.

This sacrilegious element to The Halfway House also makes it's even more salacious—the constant shorts at nuns, priests and the Catholic Church gives it a nice cynical tone which fits perfectly with the tone of the film.

Everything has been carefully plotted to offer not only a great science fiction and horror tale but a constant stream of wit and humour. Everything seems to have a humorous twist and double meaning, From the sexist senior policemen to the vicious dialogue of Sister Cecilia, for god's sake even the young policeman is named Dick Sheen !

At the same time while it is a comedy, this is a monster horror film as well, so there are some nice gory moments including a disembowelment and a poor young man losing his head at the most inappropriate moment !

The cinematography of The Halfway House is also impressive, the look of St.Magdalene's is all too real and really evokes that awful feeling of decaying religious institutions ruled by perverse priests and evil nuns !

The way it lingers on the cross, statues and religious images and uses the darkness of the basement to its advantage really shows very superior direction.

I really love this movie! It takes elements from all my favorite genres- 1950's Science Fiction, Cthulhu / Lovecraft tales, gore, monsters, Women in Prison, Reform girl tales and even Nunsplotation.

The original title was "Gut Eating Monsters from Hell" and it smacks of the drive-in and midnight movies and to be honest, it is the sort of film you would have driven miles to see at midnight at your local drive-in in the Seventies and Eighties, but now it has been done even better and certainly wilder and has been made available in high quality on DVD.

You can see the best in sleaze and schlock in the privacy of your own living room !!

The Halfway House is presented in high quality widescreen with Dolby Digital 2.00 or 5.1.

There are also some great extras including an audio commentary, deleted scenes, an uncensored trailer, "Gut Eating Monsters from Hell" - The Making of The Halfway House and a music video.

**Web:** <http://www.halfwayhouse-movie.com/>

## Hangar 18 15 Minutes Short

Hangar 18 is an Indie short which explores the world of black ops and secret government missions. After spending time in the 'Hangar', Lt. Harry Gonzalez cannot distinguish what is normal life and what was part of his "black ops" mission. As time passes he becomes increasingly disturbed and delusional and a new mission takes control of his violent psyche - kill anything he comes across.

Since Lt. Gonzalez was away for quite some time and his wife did not know whether he was still alive, she decided to abort their child and this comes to haunt him. As he goes totally over the edge he becomes a killing machine with a large knife.

The government decides he is an unnecessary risk and sends several agents to kill him and this brings the story full circle back to the Hangar where Harry learns of his terrible past. It seems Harry's "black op" mission was far more horrible than he can contemplate, his role was to impregnate female test subjects as a part of a 'super soldier program' and when the girls are no longer needed, he was to dispose of them. The problem is, the conditioning he has received is still running...

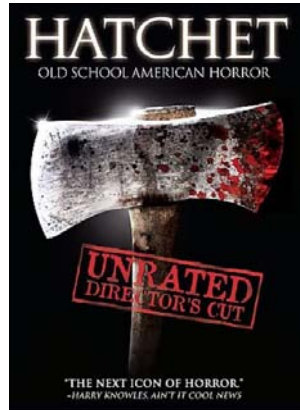
This is an intriguing short which not only offers a solid plot, combining conspiracy theory with current events, but offers some great action. The acting is reasonable for a low budget short and the cinematography creates a suspenseful mood. The acts of violence are believably depicted and all in all this is an impressive sci fi type short with some interesting political resonances.

**Web:** <http://www.richardchandlerp.com>



**Hatchet**  
**Anchor Bay**  
**Adam Green**  
**R1 DVD**

Hatchet is one of those great horror films which harks back to the old days of violent slashers and inbred killers. In many ways it is a classic "redneck psycho killer" tale adapted into a modern package.



The story opens with a nice cameo by Robert Englund - a couple of local yokels are hunting for croc and get more than they bargained for. This classic opening is typical 80's slasher fare with buckets of blood and guts and certainly starts the film with a bang. We then move into a nice modern twist, New Orleans Mardi Gras, Marilyn Manson soundtrack and lots and lots of tits.

It seems Ben has broken up with his girlfriend and his mates have taken him to the Mardi Gras to take his mind off it all.

He, on the other hand, is not impressed with the constant booze and vomiting and decides to look for a midnite ghost trip. Another cameo follows from Tony Todd (Candyman) and they are on their way into the night.

Hatchet sets the stage for the action nicely. While there are some jumps and starts there is really little action for a good forty five minutes into the film. Misdirection is used to keep us wondering whether this is a slasher film or whether Victor Crowley is a myth and the real foe is a crocodile. However, when the slaughter begins, boy does it begin !

Kane Hodder, Jason in many of the later Friday the 13th entries plays Crowley and is superb in the role. Crowley is suitably deformed and horrid, the violence and gore is incredibly well done and there are enough shocks to stop your heart !



The acting is solid and the bitching, moaning and arguing between the characters adds an extra level. The incompetent tour director just in from the city, the fake director making his own private adult movies, the would be actresses and of course, the local girl come hero, all make the story more than a simple two dimensional horror. The end is great and comes with a nice twist, as one would expect.

It should be clear however that this isn't a deep film, it is a homage to 80's splatter and it works exceptionally well for what it is, while certainly it has a good sense of humour, dark wit and some great twists, ultimately it is the sheer joy of over the top slaughter which sells it.

**Last House on the Beach**  
**Severin**  
**R1 DVD**

Ingmar Bergman's The Virgin Spring (1960) is still seen as the classic tale of rape and revenge, however, in the Seventies filmmakers taking inspiration from Bergman's work and wishing



to express it in a more modern setting, jumped genre and moved into what could be best described as rape revenge exploitation cinema.

The first film credited with such a jump was the highly controversial Wes Craven film Last House on the Left (1972) and from there the genre produced such other titles as Night Train Murders and Bay of Blood and the highly successful but notorious I spit on your Grave. One of the most unusual releases of the period was La Settima Donna, or The Seventh Woman marketed in the West as Last House on the Beach (1978).

Out of all the rape-revenge films of the period, Last House on the Beach is the most unusual. It has a strong art-film feel, using all manner of unusual cinematic tricks ranging from strange angles through to creative editing.

While it is an extremely violent, brutal and vicious film, it tends to take the approach that less is more and actually shows a lot less violence than you first think. It tends to infer what occurs and uses careful editing to allow your imagination to fill in the gaps, this actually makes the film more effective and at times far more unpleasant than if it actually showed more.





It is interesting to discuss the film with people after they first watch it, nearly always they think they have seen far more than is actually in the film. The unusual filming style and editing has been used to great effect in *Last House on the Beach* to create a constantly violent and hostile feel so that every scene seems far worse than it is. This is not to underplay the savagery of much the imagery in the film.

*Last House on the Beach* opens with a strangely art film type introduction. We enter a scene from a low angle of the seeing people's shoes and bags, we never see their faces. Then suddenly we realize this is a bank robbery and as it goes horribly wrong and a gun sprays bullets through a group of people and they fall to the floor bleeding. It seems one of the bank robbers has been killed and Aldo, Walter and Nino travel towards the countryside looking to hide out until the heat is off.

We then see another scene, again first shot from a low angle and then rising upwards to show a range of young girls playing on a beach. You know these two worlds are going to collide and it isn't going to be nice!

Aldo, Walter and Nino find an isolated home by the beach which looks just like what they need. Inside Cristina and a group of young girls to whom she is guardian, are practising for an upcoming Shakespeare festival.

They take the girls hostage and begin a journey of degradation, violence and rape. The first killing sets the tone for the film, the hired help is bashed to death and finished off with an iron to the head.



As the men discover Cristina is a Nun she is degraded and then raped and the girls are all subjected to psychological, physical and sexual abuse.

Nino attempts to rape one of the girls and gets stabbed with a hair pin in the leg and this sets in play a major aspect of the plot.

The rape scenes are brutal but again not especially that explicit.

For example, in one of the major rape scenes the whole scene is shown with a slow motion introduction and then from the perspectives of the faces of the rapists and the victims.

We also see Cristina held back by Aldo, watching from the sideline. This is a compelling and unpleasant scene and the lack of actual explicitness means that the scene has a added emotional punch but actually lacks what we could consider to be explicit content.

The character development is surprisingly solid for an exploitation film, Aldo is at first presented as more restrained than the others, unsure of their methods and perhaps even a little sympathetic to their plight. Then slowly you begin to realize he is the mastermind of the gang and indeed, he was the killer at the bank robbery.

This deliberate play on character is superbly done and gives the film extra depth. The two "meathead" criminals seem, at first, to be the most dangerous and yet as the film continues you actually realize that Aldo is by far the worse—calculating, cruel, vicious and manipulative and that he uses the violence of the other two men to get what he wants most— money.

There are some especially nasty scenes, as Nino's leg becomes more and more infected, he takes revenge on the girl who rejected him by raping her with a sharpened wooden stick

This leads to the final climatic scenes where Cristina, realizing that non violence is not the answer, injects tapes Nino's mouth shut and injects him with poison then takes Nino's pistol and shoots Walters at point blank range. She then attacks Aldo.

When Aldo doesn't die the girls gang up together and in a scene of Dionysian fury, beat him to death with garden tools and anything else they can find. Cristina removes his ring (the symbol of her faith) symbolizing her rejection of non violence and her life as a nun...

While certainly this is exploitation cinema, the mixture of an excellent and innovative cinematic style which borders on art house, excellent character

development, a killer soundtrack filled with Italian groove and lounge (and some rock as well) make this a real treat.

It is a shocking film, filled with depravity and violence and nunsploitation and yet in the end it has the ultimate twist – Cristina becomes a “vengeful” Nun fighting for her girls with righteous violence.

Extras include a lengthy high quality featurette, "Holy Beauty vs. the Evil Beasts," which has Lovelock talking about his career as well as his memories of working on the film and his co-stars and the German and Italian theatrical trailers.

Severin's presentation is a very clear with a nice 2.35:1 anamorphic picture and superb sound, the soundtrack is particularly impressive ranging from groove, jazz and lounge through to rock and heavier fare at the more brutal moments.

This is a superb edition of a very unique and rare film.

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### Left In Darkness Starz /Anchor Bay R4 DVD

**Reviewer:** Bob  
Estreich

Celia's mother died in childbirth. She has been raised by her dotting grandfather ever since, until he died a year ago. In her childhood she had a mysterious and ghostly friend who protected her from harm, but she has grown out of that.



Now 21, Celia and her friend attend a college party where Celia is drugged, raped, and dies of an overdose. She wakes up to find she is trapped in a sort of limbo land between heaven and hell. It is populated by zombie-like creatures who eat souls and can take on the persona of the owner of the soul. Fortunately her childhood protector is there to help her adjust.

He points out that Celia is safe inside her “sanctuary”, an area where, while there is some sort of power to provide light, she cannot be attacked. Only Celia can invite people into her sanctuary. The spirits of her grandfather and mother try to protect her and help her, but they are no match for the soul-eaters.

From here it is a question of who Celia can trust. Are her grandfather and her mother really themselves, or soul-eaters? Is her friend really her friend, or has he been taken by a soul-eater, or is he something worse? Is there a way out for Celia?



The film takes place in the old house, with a few car interior shots for variety, but the repetitive use of the same rooms has “low budget” all over it. Low Budget it may be, but Steven Monroe's brilliant direction and the restrained special effects provide a level of tension I had not expected.

The story moves quickly from crisis to crisis, and even the few quiet moments have a hint of menace in them. I was surprised to find that this film went straight to DVD, possibly as a result of Monroe's earlier films being received without much enthusiasm. He has made up for them with this gem. The skilfully written story is handled with a style and class that lifts it above the usual shock/horror/buckets of blood movie.

It is helped by quite good acting. Monica Keena does a pretty good job as Celia, even if the script is only adequate (again, the low budget). David Anders plays Donovan, the ambiguous childhood friend, very powerfully.

He has the best part in the story, but you must wait until near the end of the movie to find out if he is really good or bad. Every time the camera closes in on his face your opinion changes.

The cinematographer, Matthew Heckerling, strengthens the suspense by his contrast between the light (safety) and the dark (menace).

It is one of those unusual films where a really good piece of drama comes from a low budget simply because everyone involved really worked at it.





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**Legend of Hammer Vampires**  
**Narrated by Edward De Souza**  
**Don Fearney**  
**R2 DVD**

It is amazing that even after so many years when you mention vampires, werewolves or horror films in general people think Hammer. While there may be a new generation of horror films with its own heroes and villains and a modern sense of style and presentation, there is something enduring about Hammer which continues to attract a large audience.

This audience is not just old fans, many new and younger horror aficionados are discovering Hammer for the first time and suddenly realizing what gothic horror means. In the end many, like ourselves, come to celebrate the unique characteristics which make up the "Hammer experience".

In my mind it is "once bitten, hooked for a lifetime", once you experience that combination of the design, feel, mood and plot of a Hammer film (and, of course, the great actors and actresses) you want more and more.

It is easy to see how popular Hammer still is; there is a large number of books on the market and new titles regularly being released. These from the wide scope of the fairly definitive *The Hammer Story: The Authorised History of Hammer Films* by Marcus Hearn and Alan Barnes (Titan Books) and volumes on various stages of the studios development such as *Hammer Films: The Elstree Studios Years* by Wayne Kinsey (Tomahawk Press) to books on individual stars, motifs and genres.

Hammer is studied in film schools and in psychological classes, the motifs of Hammer horror have become part of our cultural landscape, both in entertainment and in academia. The number of books on the psychology of the motifs found with Hammer films is quite astounding.

The DVD market has taken Hammer to new horizons with all sorts of individual releases and collections including rare and hardly seen Hammer titles being restored and made available. There are editions in every region including some truly gigantic sets such as the 21 Ultimate Hammer Collection from Optimum in the UK (Region 2) There are now even Hammer Noir and Hammer Adventure sets bringing non horror titles to a new generation.

The recent release of *Terror of the Tongs* and the *Strangers of Bombay* in the Region 1 Hammer Adventure set was the first time they have even been available on DVD, indeed they had hardly ever been seen since their original release.

At the same time I am always on the lookout for documentaries on Hammer. However, I really want them to give an inside view. Sure researchers can

put together a good doco, but when someone is truly dedicated to a subject, it shows. *Legend of Hammer Vampires* is a film which is obviously made by a real Hammer enthusiast. It has the sense of "passion" that comes to a product which has been created by someone truly enamored by their interest.



Don Fearney's documentary on Hammer's vampire films is truly quite a find. While it focuses on the *Vampires of Hammer*, it also offers an excellent general history of Hammer along the way, of course with a focus on Horror. It is beautifully presented with an excellent narration by Edward De Souza.

The film itself is 96 minutes and throughout offers us rare footage, stills, posters and "inside" information you are not likely to find anywhere else. We learn about all aspects of the Hammer experience from the great figures such as Lee and Cushing to the many Hammer girls and, of course, the many directors and producers that worked on so many films. We get lots of inside information, history and references with a special care taken to offer us a comprehensive history of the Vampire within the Hammer canon.

There is some quite rare behind the scenes footage and some revealing interviews from such Hammer personages as Caroline Munro, Tudor Gates and Carol Marsh, among others.

The documentary is tightly made, well edited and professionally presented. The script has obviously been worked on for a long time, informing us while entertaining us as well. My attention did not lag for a second and I greatly enjoyed the personal touch given by the memories presented in the interviews.

There are also extended interviews from both Tudor Gates and John Gilling and a very nice show of set designs.

This is a labour of love and deserves our support. While it may not be available at your local DVD store, it is easy to purchase via paypal and you will be rewarded by getting your hands on this extremely informative and entertaining DVD.

Send Don Fearney an email on [figsculpt@aol.com](mailto:figsculpt@aol.com) for details.

## The Murder Game

Warner Bros

R1 DVD

Web: <http://www.murdergamemovie.com>

The Murder Game is an innovative and creative horror and suspense film. As you watch it you realize that it is never quite what it seems, it crosses genres between horror, suspense and psychological intrigue as well as offering an exploration of personal conflicts and relationships.

The premise, as obvious from the name, comes from the idea of a murder game. From the classic whodunit turned into an interactive form of entertainment that has become a well established pastime but with a twist. It reminds me a bit of the car crash game in John Water's Female Trouble, replicating a horrid experience as a way of escaping emotional dysfunction and boredom.

Eric (Steve Polites) and his teenage friends, seem perpetually bored and rather superficial. In an attempt to alleviate their condition, they play The Murder Game, where the person who picks the Queen of Spades becomes a killer and then sets out to find and kill the other members of the game using all manner of prop weapons from hammers to knives and rope.

When they are busted playing the game at home they decide to sneak out and play it in an isolated storage warehouse which has locked down for the night. Extra suspense is added by various interpersonal issues. Colin (Samuel Klein) is Lucy's (Julia Pickens) strange looking gothic cousin who has been seemingly grounded for smoking at school and her father hovering in the background of the film is a stereotypical overbearing parent.

At first the game unfolds as simply as one would expect, interpersonal tensions are showing, the Goth is being demonized, Eric seems to be the quintessential jock with little sensitivity and all brawn and we have a couple of dope smokers. However, there is a sense that something is not quite right. They think someone else is in the building and soon the first bodies begin to appear.

The gore and violence is well presented with excellent special effects. What I especially like is the way in which different genres are explored. There are periods of suspense with excellent filming as they run, hide and are stalked throughout the complex and these are carefully interwoven with scenes of strong violence and the decaying of their personal relationships. Rather than just being a straight Slasher stalker film, the violence is carefully spaced throughout other themes to make it all the more effective when it is shown.

As first look some of the acting seems a little amateur, the cast not being especially well known. How-

ever, I think this actually helps in the film in a strange way. The essence of The Murder Game, as I understand it, is the play on the relationship between the fictional "Murder Game" and the real "Murder game" and how the line between them has been blurred in the killers psyche. Accordingly, the actors performing as though "they are acting" reinforces this blurring of the game and the reality of what is occurring. On one level they are "playing at a game", on another level "they are playing" and getting killed. Indeed when the final revelation of the killer is made, she declares that she became addicted to killing during an earlier murder game at another school and this is simply another game, so the layers of game playing are reinforced.

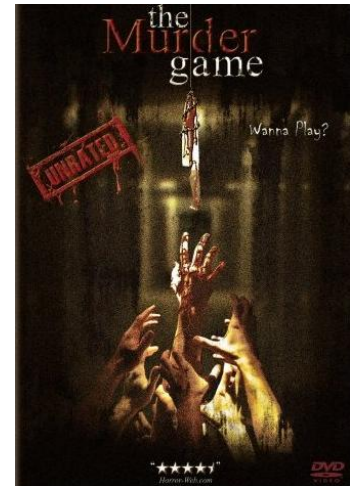
The plot is nicely textured as throughout the movie there are the decaying interpersonal relationships as the various characters blame each other and there are deliberately off putting hints such as missing weapons, phones damaged etc which could move the blame in any direction. The disturbed occupant of one of the storage units is a classic red herring which helps add to the whodunit aspect of the tale.

The scapegoating of the Gothic character was well developed, he is introduced as an unsympathetic outsider and yet slowly you realize he is probably the most sensitive and human of them all. He takes the blame for others as he understands that he is already "alienated" and hence being blamed doesn't really matter.

However, of course, this comes back to haunt him as Lucy's father is happy to follow his prejudice and accept Colin (now dead) committed the murders and the real killer walks free – who would suspect a lovely young girl ?

This is an impressive film which has a lot going for it. Certainly when the killer gets into her final spree it is a startling streak of violence and gore, ranging from expert use of a set of garden shears, a classic disembowelment scene and a rather inventive death by fire extinguisher.

At the same time this is balanced with lots of suspense, stress, twists and turns and some nice character exploration. I enjoyed it immensely and felt it was a intelligent horror film which used an interesting plot and character development to give it the extra depth I like to see in a movie.







**Night of the Hell Hamsters**  
**Paul Champion**  
**16 Minutes Approx**

Night of the Hell Hamsters is a professional horror tale which is surprisingly effective as both a horror short and as a humorous macabre tale. It has the feel of an old world late film with a great overblown horror sound score. It also features some lovely photography, false starts (such as the boyfriend appearing in the shadows at the door) and all the classic horror tricks including a very tongue in cheek sense of humour. The Ouija board gag is a nice take, using a kids toy with a shot glass and a drop of blood gives it an effectively perverse twist. The possessed Hamsters are great, fun, bloody and cheesy. The ending is classic horror fare, the strong female fighting against all odds, using whatever is at hand, especially considering her boyfriend has just lost his innards to a killer hamster. But, of course, alas, things only get worse and she has whole world of them to face..

**Web:** <http://www.nightofthehellhamsters.com>

**One Missed Call**  
**Warner Bros**  
**R4 DVD**

One Missed Call follows in the footsteps of the Japanese ghost tale The Ring and its myriad permutations and while having a similar story arc is still a successful film in its own right. This is a re-make by Eric Valette of the Japanese film "Chakushin Ari" (2003) by Takashi Miike and considering Miike's reputation, it is hard act to follow. But while the plot seems to be, at first, obvious there are some nice twists and turns, good set pieces and an excellent mood and these work to make it a truly chilling experience.

The film opens as Shelley is complaining to her friends of strange experiences, some time before she received a vaguely threatening phone call and since



them has felt off balance. At the precise time indicated in the phones message, Shelley and her poor cat are dragged into their backyard pool down. A small red lolly pops to the surface.

As calls are received by each victim one after another, it seems some sort of chain reaction is occurring. Each victim receives a strange call which indicates the time of their future demise and hints at its very nature. The call is received via a different ring tone and even arrives when the phones battery is removed. As the time approaches the victim begins to see bodies in various states of decay, symbols of putrefaction such as worms and slugs and great looking apparitions ! These ghosts and undead people look great and create a very dark ambient mood to the film. Each death is suitably gruesome and the shock effect of the various killings, ranging from drowning to death by train and a metal bar through the chest, give the film a nice "edge of your seat" feel.

This reoccurring motif of the strange ring tone and the red lolly add a nice texture to the film and give it a strangely chilling yet childlike feel, something which is significant later.

As the story continues, we even have a semi-amusing exorcist attempting to "purify" the phone in real time on a "Miracle" TV program but to no avail and victim three still dies. By this time we have both Beth and a local policeman hot on the trail of the source of this supernatural contagion.

There is also a sub plot about Beth's abusive mother and her father's suicide, shown in flashback, which adds an "emotional hook" to the story, it also helps set the stage for the exploration of the nature of the vengeful ghost as well as some misdirection.

There is a nice twist in the middle of the film, at first you consider this to be a fairly traditional ghost tale. When it is suggested that the source of the problem is a mother with "Munchausen syndrome by proxy" and that her body may be lying undiscovered in St.Lukes, a hospital which recently burnt down, you think that will be the end of the matter.



However, we come to understand that the mother was actually trying to protect her daughter (and the latest victim) and the true ghostly killer is her oldest daughter.

We then learn that the daughter had been injuring her younger sister and died of an asthma attack alone in her room and that she is now a vengeful ghost, a traditional Japanese folk motif.

The scenes in the abandoned, burnt out hospital are superb and the mood created by Beth running through the building are highly charged and beautifully filmed, when the mother's reanimated body lies over Beth trying to protect her is truly creepy and nicely builds up the tension of the film. The climax of the film is powerful and the revelation of the ghost, which has been kept back until the end, certainly works.

One Missed Call maybe a little predictable, however, the unusual twists and turns in the plot, the texture and mood created especially in such "set pieces" as the burnt hospital and the great looking ghosts make this well worth watching.

**Otto**  
**Bruce La Bruce**  
**Kojo Pictures**  
**Distributed by:**  
**Beyond**  
**Entertainment**  
**R4 DVD**



**Web:** <http://www.kojopictures.com.au>

Being a Zombie is *"the only sane and logical response to a dead and sterile world"*

Bruce La Bruce makes very confronting and edgy entertainment, he always works to push the boundaries and explore new territories. His earliest films explored the assumptions we make about sex, while Raspberry Reich was part comedy part adult movie about modern leftist Germans adopting the culture and politics of the extreme left wing movements of the 1970s. It was amusing, sarcastic, sexually charged and surprisingly intelligent.

Otto moves into new territory, while La Bruce in the past has focused on sex and politics, here sex, politics, relationships and cultural decay are mixed together with horror and death.

This is not your average film and includes wallops of sex and violence so be prepared for an unusual journey. The film opens with a poetic introduction, filmed in black and white, showing the awakening of Otto from the grave and with a "cool" voice over discussing the state of the modern zombie. It seems zombies have slowly evolved the ability to speak and reason and are now more accepted in society. The voice over has a semi documentary feel and also

discusses the philosophical nature of the zombie while suggesting it could also be read as a metaphor.

Throughout the film various cinematic techniques are used to create a distance between the viewer and the subject, including black and white, colour, spot colour, even 1930's silent film.



The aim of these seems to be to emphasize the alienated and estranged character of Otto and indeed of the zombies in general. La Bruce also mixes a logical plot with surreal elements and a challenging mix of sex and death, poetry and philosophical ramblings offered in both voiceover and by various characters

There is also a interesting sub plot about Medea Yarn, an art house filmmaker who is making a film about Zombies called "up with dead people". This film within a film is a very effective and communicative motif. Yarn wants to use the zombie image to make a point about the nature of society and in conjunction with her brother Adolf and her lover Hella Bent, she is at last creating her "epic political-porno-zombie movie".

This sub plot is poignant, cynical and vindictive. It offers an ongoing critique of the pretentious baby boomer capitalist who while sprouting left wing rhetoric is actually simply just another consumer. She sprouts meaningless clichés, wears goth clothing and "plays" at being unique and different and yet comes across as totally artificial.

As she attempts to show her actors what she expects in her work, she plays her other earlier "underground films" (an amazing cinematic touch, a series of films shown by a filmmaker making a zombie film inside a film about zombies !), they are the epitome of empty style and vacuity.

Throughout the plot we have these juxtapositions between the real zombie and the fakes, the outsider (Otto) and the "would be" (Medea Yarn and her







crowd), between fantasy and self delusion and reality, between authentic difference and pretension and so on.

This is further emphasized by the fact that every time Hella Bent is shown she is either shown as within a silent film or in a black and white silent film haze. She is shown as being totally “unreal” – locked in her own pretension and delusions as are Medea Yarn and her film crew.

Bruce La Bruce has also encoded an exploration of homophobia into the film which is powerful and at times confronting. While the zombies are now “somewhat more accepted” and seen as have developed “speech” (we now have a “voice”) and reason (i.e. we are not “disordered”), they are still treated as pariahs and objects of fear.

Probably the most moving (and serious) episode in the film is when Otto is bashed. Up until this scene Otto has been having flashbacks of Rudolf his love, these are beautifully and romantically photographed and shown.

However, when he meets his ex, Rudolf reminds him that Rudolf dumped him as Rudolf just can’t cope with any sort of illness and couldn’t deal with Otto being sick.

As Otto wanders in confusion, he is followed by a gang of mindless young men and brutally bashed.

The music to this scene is by Antony and the Johnsons and creates a poignant scene, the message of which is that even when you are dead you are still not safe.

La Bruce, however, is also a nuanced filmmaker and he also explores the way in which sex can over love and affection and the way society and, at times, the gay community reduces love to sex alone.

*“The world is meat. We are meat.”*

This is shown as a re-occurring motif ranging from Otto’s lover rejecting him due the fact that Otto became ill to Otto to relationship between sex, meat and consumption. We are what we eat becomes more literal in Otto with all manner of sex and consumption.

There is also an interesting subtext of whether Otto is really a zombie. When he meets his ex-lover he realizes he had depression and was once in an institution and this is followed later in the film with a love film in which he doesn’t look physically dead. Yet after he has had sex his partner’s left eye has turned red ? So is Otto a zombie, is he simply an isolated outsider ? We never really know. This ambiguity is the basis for the whole film where the gay zombie is the ultimate outsider, indeed; perhaps the undead Otto is the only really alive person in the whole film.

*“The living have no respect for the dead”*

This is a stunning film mixing horror, eroticism and social commentary in a work which is beautifully filmed and scored with a superb soundtrack. It will haunt you for quite a while and give you a lot of food for thought as well as being a damn good zombie film !

Quite an achievement really...

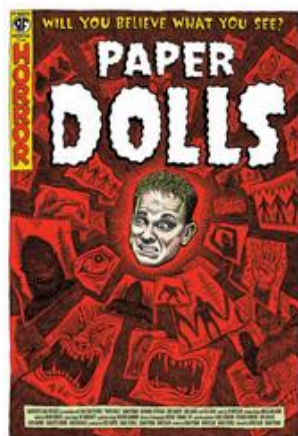
### **Paper Dolls Badfritters Films**

**Web:** <http://www.badfritterfilms.com>

Paper Dolls is a smart and terrifying psychological thriller. It opens with a group of typical teen on the way to a party, they can’t wait to get some booze and girls. They are filming their graduation night with a handheld camera and this gives the opening scenes a powerful sense of immediacy. As one of them is about to “get lucky” he is brutally attacked and killed, this is shown in “frozen” camera shorts which creates an “crime” scene mood. It is also accompanied by superbly melancholic music which create a real sense of dread as the credits roll.

We then see Nate bruised in what we presume is a jail like environment discussing what has recently occurred to him. In flashback he tells his story. It seems Travis and his school friend Nate decided to

to take a road trip to Canada in Nate's new car. Nate decides to follow a closed road into the Canadian woodlands and suddenly they are attacked by strange humanoid creatures with Nate taken into the woods. Travis calls Chris, Nat's brother, and they decide to search for Nate and with the arsenal Chris brings with him fight these creatures with dire and gruesome results.



Paper Dolls is beautifully acted, well filmed and packed with surprises. It uses a wide range of cinematic styles including handheld photography, "freeze frame camera" shots right and wide, colourful shots of lakes and forests. Each one evokes a different mood and sense. I am especially impressed with the use of ambient environmental sound and music to create a suspenseful mood, at times it seems nature itself is the adversary.

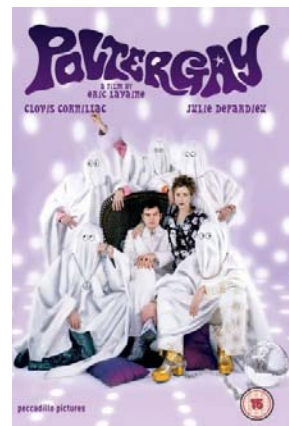
There is also a nice movement between various stages of the story, we move between Nate in Jail and his flashbacks and between the unresolved original attack and the final revelation, but what is the real truth about Sasquatch? The neat thing about Paper Dolls is its deliberate ambiguity. Is the shop owner really an eccentric professor with an over the top tale about inbred Spanish slaves or just a shop owner? Is Travis a mentally disturbed jealous teenager or is Sasquatch real? The way in which the different possible "storylines" are weaved together to create a tale which is smart and suspenseful is very impressive.

The scene when the policeman challenges Travis is powerful and confronting. We then see the whole story "replayed" through the policeman's eyes with Travis as the Killer and begin to question which version is the truth. This is very masterfully done and highly effective. We cannot tell whether Travis is innocent or guilty and whether the policeman is simply overzealous, especially since at a number of earlier occasions he does not come across as an especially reasonable copy.

Then the policewoman seems to find evidence to back Travis' story and yet we know from the flashback that he is in jail. How do we reconcile what we have seen? This is the beauty of Paper Dolls, it is an intelligent, intriguing and well edited work. The acting is solid, the plot well written and the suspense palatable. This is certainly innovative use of the Sasquatch story to create an intriguing and taut psychological thriller.

**Poltergay  
Peccadillo  
Pictures  
ALL REGION PAL**

Marc and Emma move into their new house, it has cost them a twenty year mortgage and they have a lot of work to do to make it livable. Marc is a bit of a hunk and the camera certainly enjoys his look. During the first section of the film the camera seems focused on Marc and you are not sure why, however, soon all is revealed.



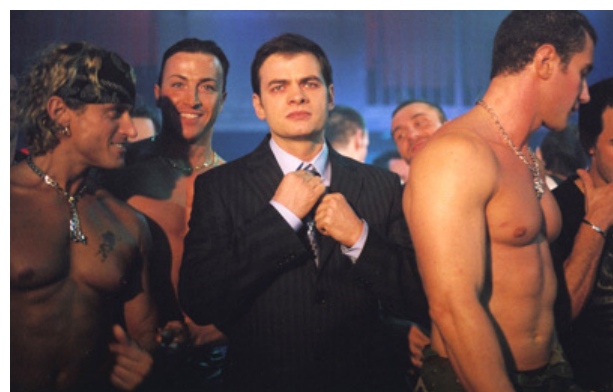
It seems that during the 1970's the basement of this house was a Gay nightclub which was destroyed by fire when a foam machine self destructed electrocuting its clientele.

The house is now haunted by the spirits of five gay clubbers who are doomed to dance to Boney M every night staying young for eternity!

The various ghosts all have nice personality quirks, ranging from the obviously "gay in denial" to the left wing radical and the very effete possibly transgender who seems obsessed with woman. These all add a nice extra dimension to the film and some good character development.

It seems that while Marc can see them and is shocked by their outrageous antics, Emma cannot and as his life spirals out of control, he hits her father over the head with a shovel (mistaking him for a gay ghost), loses his job and Emma leaves him.

He tries to come to terms with what is occurring, even questioning his own sanity and sexuality, but in the end he realizes that he must win back the love of his life and find a way to free the imprisoned gay spirits. Poltergay is a rather nice piece of light entertainment, a mixture of ghost story and comedy; it has a great sense of play and has lots of wit and humour.





The story moves through various stages and even has some nice reminders about tolerance and diversity, but it is not meant to be serious entertainment. In the middle section you even wonder if it will be a “coming out” story but rather than follow what would have been a predictable path, the five gay ghosts actually help Marc win back his girl and in return the house is turned back into a dance club, this time called “Pompeii”.

There are some especially fun scenes, one that springs to mind is when Marc takes them on a trip into the heart of Paris and they see what gay life is now like compared to the underground culture of 1979.

This celebration of the “Gay promised land” is fun and rather nice. There is also a rather touching moment when the key couple of the tale are re-united, ghost and human, many years later in “Pompeii”.

Poltergay is a rather silly and zany comedy with a great sense of camp and offers lots of great laughs along the way.

**Web:** <http://www.peccadillopictures.com/>

### **Rampo Noir Siren Visual R4 DVD**

This is an unusual anthology of four very stylistically different films, based on the masterpieces of great Japanese mystery writer, Edogawa Rampo (a pseudonym based on Edgar Allan Poe). While each of the stories are produced by different directors, they all encode similar themes and explore a range of overarching themes and ideas. These strange excursions into madness are entitled Mars’ Canal, Mirror Hell, Caterpillar and Crawling Bugs.

As the first experience begins you are confronted with a very strange presentation. There is a naked man crawling along the canals of Mars, it is deadly silent and there is a stark feel of nothingness interspersed with scenes of sexual conflict and violence. There is literally no sound and you become quite disoriented by the way in which the first scenes unfold, however, as you get used to the starkness of the pieces certain concepts come to mind.

These ideas really underpin the reoccurring motifs of the whole series, regardless of whether they are more narrative (such as Mirror Hell) or more conceptual (such as Mars’ Canal). Throughout these tales we are exploring issues relating to intimacy and dis-



tance, sex and death and love and betrayal. While each is expressed in a very different way, each one reflects on a facet of the question of how we relate to others. There is also a semi lineal link made between the films by the use of a “Sherlock Holmes” type character known as Mr. Akechi, but his real significance is more as a link between different modes of the film and is somewhat peripheral.

In “Mirror Hell” we have a fairly straight forward narrative tale, beautifully shot and filled with powerful images and unusual concepts. It is essentially a Narcissus tale where a young man sees himself reflected in the woman around him.

However, the more he loves them, the more he feels he is losing “himself” in them. This leads to a feeling of resentment and anger with his sexual life becoming more focused on domination and bondage, until, finally murder results. Akio Jissôji certainly uses unusual methods to express these ideas including a secret tradition of Shadow Mirror magic, microwave metals moulded into mirrors which melt people’s faces and a range of quirky scientific mystical amalgams.

It is a fascinating exploration of self obsession and the inability to experience others except as reflections of oneself (hence the mirror), it ends, explosively with the beautiful Torus smashing through the mirror and becoming part of it.

The Caterpillar is certainly an astounding perverse and dark piece of cinema. It mixes a strange and dark tale of obsession and control with a phantasmagoria of images and iconography. The emphasis is constantly on caterpillars and butterflies and once again on mirrors. Throughout all episodes the concept of the mirror is used to reflect a different aspect of intimacy or lack of it, whether it be self obsession as in Mirror Hell or the avoidance of the Mirror in the Caterpillar as it reflects the frightening level that of control Tokiko holds over her husband.

Omori is a war veteran, it seems he has been badly injured in the war (indeed, turned into a drooling, limbless caterpillar) looked after by his devoted wife. But as the story unfolds, her brutality against him becomes more explicit and extreme. We realize that to stop him going to war she removed his limbs and turned him into the supposed “War God” or Veteran that he is.



This is a powerful exploration of obsession and ownership; it is brutal, confronting and at times extremely disturbing. As the story continues, she is confronted with her own madness and ends up joining her husband as a caterpillar with the assistance of a young art student who seem their “transformation” as a work of art!

The last segment *Crawling Bugs* is another astounding exploration. This time we find Masaki is obsessed with the actress Fuyou Kinoshita for which he works. However, Masaki has a problem; he is obsessed with cleanliness, germs and bugs and cannot perceive contact with another human being except as unclean.

His love for Fuyou Kinoshita is hence akin to the way the Medieval Chivalric tradition saw the ideal woman – distant, on a pedestal, perfect, clean and untouchable. Of course, as he sees more and more of her life, including her strange sexual predilections involving bugs, he becomes more and more disturbed. It is difficult to decode how much of these sequences are dreams, hallucinations or reality.

In any event, as he becomes more and more fixated on saving Fuyou Kinoshita from her impending impurity, his skin disease degenerates as well as his mental state. Finally, his desire to suspend her in purity leads him to kill her.

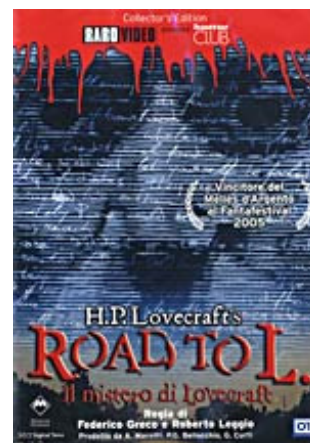
However, death is not the end, he cannot sustain her in a pure state, the germs and bugs returns. He tries to clean her and then embalm her, but to no avail, putrefaction is setting in. He then tries to cover her in plaster and paint her thereby changing her into a living doll. By this stage he is somewhat obviously moving into a state of psychosis. The film ends as he is discovered with her head inside her rotting body.

This is a fascinating and powerful series of visual experiences, crossing boundaries between horror, eroticism, madness and emotional dysfunction using the most stunning visual imagery you will have seen in a long time. *Rampo Noir* is like a long dream with rambling stories, intrusions of strange characters, undefined sexual elements and occasional nightmares. It is a stunning work of cinema.

**Web:** <http://www.sirenvisual.com.au>

## Road to L Federico Greco and Roberto Leggio Raro Video Italy

The *Road to L* is a highly imaginative exploration of the myths of H.P Lovecraft. The title has a double meaning and refers both to the road to Lovecraft and to mythical location in Italy where Lovecraft supposedly travelled in 1926 and learned about the old Gods.



The story works primarily as a first person pseudo documentary focusing on the discovery of a travel journal dated 1926 which is believed to shed light on an unknown period in the life of H.P Lovecraft. While it was believed he never travelled outside America, the manuscript suggests he travelled to Italy and there found a small settlement on which he based his *Shadow over Innsmouth*.

This is a very creative film which slowly develops from a documentary into something far more frightening and sinister. It starts as a film about making a documentary and then slowly begins to create a mood of tension and dread. The township seems suspicious, there is a strange religious sect which meets each year and local who refuse to discuss their traditions. There are also underground tunnels which lead under the town. This last feature really begins to up the tension, at first there is an anticlimax with a hamster, but then they find the bodies of dead gutted fish and strange markings in the tunnel and realize something is very wrong. The use of handheld camera work, limited lighting and the strained interpersonal relations between the members of the crew - all add to a slow increase in suspense and tension.

The breakthrough comes as they learn about the *Filo Tales*, local legends which seem connected to the stories of H.P Lovecraft. It also seems that a contact they have been referred to, Andrea Roberta, made a similar connection and vanished in strange circumstances in 1997 some years before.

As the story unfolds they hear rumours of UFOs, aliens and strange creatures, these are presented (as is the whole film) with excerpts from Lovecraft's tales and occasional graphically illustrated aspects of his myths.

As they go to explore an uncharted section of the local region, they find the same abandoned houses mentioned in Lovecraft's tale and things begin to get strange. There is weird music coming out of nowhere and a sense of menace in the environment.



As their investigations continue and their guide refuses to help any longer, they become lost and in the darkness and night find what they are looking for...Innismouth and its occupants...

This is a truly ingenious way of adapting Lovecraft's tale. By transplanting it to Italy and connecting it to local myths and legends, the tales becomes entwined with all sorts of strange local customs, myths and tales. On a minimum budget with a resourceful use of handheld camera work, editing, and very occasional special effects, a mood is created which is brooding and ominous.

The soundtrack is superb and creates a real feeling of threat and menace, it drives the film into some truly dark territory.

Road to L is a highly successful film on so many levels, it creates true horror with so little, has excellent character development, an fascinating plot and creates a mood which will haunt you for a long time after watching it.

**Web:** <http://www.rarovideo.com>

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**George A Romero  
Collection  
3 DVD Set  
Umbrella  
Entertainment**

The George A Romero Collection from Umbrella is a solid collection of Romero's earlier works – The Crazies, Martin and Dawn of the Dead. While Dawn of the Dead and his later Zombie works are better known, I think that both Crazies and Martin are significant titles within his canon of work and well worth seeing.

Since Dawn of the Dead has been reviewed in earlier issues of Synergy, I will concentrate this review on the other two lesser known titles.

In the Crazies we have many of the themes which Romero later develops in his Zombie films. A military aircraft crashes into the water supply of Evan's City, Pennsylvania, infecting the inhabitants with a biological weapon known as Trixie. At first the military are told it was a vaccine and hence minimal preparation is made for a possible outbreak.

But soon the truth becomes painfully obvious, it is an uncontrollable biological weapon that has no cure



and causes death or insanity. The townspeople are soon driven to murderous rages and bouts of insane behaviour. The military are trying to keep the town under quarantine but with very limited resources the situation is a potential disaster. The president is notified and a plane with atomic weapons is flying overhead.

The townsfolk are terrified and begin to fight back and the situation gets out of control. Yet who are the monsters ? The military responds with what seems like extreme force (with many of them coming down with the virus) as the cycle of violence spirals out of control. A small group tries to escape but things are not always what they seem. How can you tell if someone has the virus? As the situation degenerates Trixie spreads.

The Crazies is an early effort by George Romero and with a relatively low budget he has produced a telling science fiction film which offers a solid horror experience as well as a dark reflection on the military and army culture. The fact that the military are nearly always depersonalized in white outfits with gas masks intensifies the overall tension of the film. This is a film strong on mood, there is a powerful emotional tension built up throughout the film until the climax which brings home the nature of germ warfare.

While not one of Romero's major works, The Crazies has been under-rated and it is great to see it available in Australia on DVD. It also offers an excellent commentary track by George A. Romero himself.





Martin is a strange and uncomfortably exploration of the myth of the vampire, but it has been turned upside down and become something totally outside our expectations. The film opens with Martin Madahas (played superbly by John Amos) stalking a woman on a train. Just as you expect him to kill her as a vampire would, the scene changes. There are no fangs, no bites nor romantic vampire mystique. He puts her to sleep using an injection of sedative and after a sexual encounter while she is drugged, slits her wrists with a razor blade drinking her blood. He then arranges the room to make it look like a suicide.

It is a powerful and confronting scene and sets the stage for a very unconventional tale.

This opening scene is a highly eroticized but for the wrong reasons. It has the traditional vampire sexual tension but expressed in a neurotic and distorted manner. This is echoed throughout the film but it comes across best when Martin to a talk back radio show and says that it would be nice to "just once have a sexy encounter without the blood and with someone who is awake". This is dark and disturbing stuff.

Martin is on the way to stay with his uncle who believes he is the curse of the family, a Nosferatu and demonises the lad at every opportunity. Slowly as more and more of the story unfolds you begin to wonder if this is a story about a vampire or a tale about the psychosis caused by family superstitions.

It seems that since the boy was young he was "destined" to be a Nosferatu like those in the line before him and with constant degradation, abuse and exorcisms (shown in black and white) he has come to fulfil the role.

Martin seems to live in a disturbed dream world when he commits his killings he sees the world in a fanciful way (also depicted in a stylized black and white way). So while on one level he is chancing an unwilling victim, sedating them and then slicing their arms with a razor, in his fantasy, he is consummating a blood pact with a lover. This mixture of fantasy and reality seem to be the essence of Martin's madness, yet the question remains - is he really a serial killer with a taste for blood or a disturbed youth driven to insanity by a violent and superstitious upbringing.

It seems interesting that Romero shows both the boy's memories of childhood (exorcisms, confrontations etc) in black and white as well as the boy's fantasies. It is though the boy has been "programmed" with the family's superstitions and religious beliefs and is simply living out their fears.

At times his memories don't seem like his own, on a number of occasions the fantasies are clearly set in the "old country" that his uncle talks about and this gives the film a sense that Martin's problem is really that is a disturbed young man mentally abused to the point of insanity. He is both sad and terrifying, murderous and vulnerable. You see the world both through his victims' eyes and through his and this makes the film an unsettling experience.

The film has a sense of sadness and melancholy and certainly ends on a tragic note. While Martin has only been only able to experience sexual satisfaction with a drugged partner, at last he finds a woman with whom he can make love only to have her commit suicide. His Uncle, convinced Martin has killed her in vampiric lust (which in this case he has not) drives a stake through his heart.

This is an intriguing story with many different levels of meaning. Time and time again Romero uses Martin to ridicule the myth of the "magic" of vampires such as garlic, crucifixes etc and yet Martin does kill and does so brutally. In the end Martin seems to be as much about the power of belief and how it can be twisted as much as about the myth of the Vampire.

Romero has really turned the whole vampire tradition on its head and used it to get us to question the danger of superstition and where it can lead and the consequences on the lives of those it touches...

Martin also includes an audio commentary with George A. Romero, R. Rubinstein, T. Savini, M. Gornick and D. Rubinstein and a featurette - Making Martin: A Recounting.

Together *The Crazies* and *Martin* are both exemplary works of filmmaking and combined with *Dawn of the Dead*, they make a great package.



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## Sex Galaxy Stag Films

Sex Galaxy is the latest cult sex comedy from the creators of the film "Pervert" and with a title like Sex Galaxy you have some idea where this may go.

Set in a rather suppressed future, around 100 years from now, where all sex before marriage has been outlawed on Earth thanks to overpopulation, global warming and drought.

The world is run by irritated and annoyed men and even more nagging wives who have been frustrated before marriage and are now very bored after...

A spaceship loaded with randy but deprived astronauts sets out to make much needed repairs to Space Station Six. Temporarily free from the oppression of earth Capt. Grayson (Anthony Jenkins), randy Texan "Big" Ben Dorsett (Stephen Heiser), and inexperienced Billy (Ben Phillips) decide to make a detour to the legendary Sex Galaxy, where it is rumoured there is a planet filled with nubile and insatiable women who want nothing more than to have a good time.

Needless to say, they find a planet with buxom blond aliens, a robot pimp and a lot more weirdness that you can imagine.

Sex Galaxy bills itself as the first "green" movie using 100% recycled public domain and stock footage and to be honest it does a bang up job ! It mixes together all sorts of weird and wonderful films ranging from old Science Fiction classics to cult films, sex education filmstrips and Burlesque and stage routines ! There is even a chunk of "Voyage to the Planet of the Prehistoric Women" !

The soundtrack is great and the way in which the characters have been evolved from stock and old footage is a tribute to skill of the director. The various voice actors do good jobs and there is even some character development and a reasonable plot along the way !

Sex Galaxy is primarily a sex comedy, filled with all manner of silly and dirty jokes, ridiculous situations and deliberate plays on the commentary vs the footage, that being said it works.



Sure, Sex Galaxy is silly, even perhaps ridiculous, but that what makes it even more entertaining.

It does not make any pretence to be anything but a wild sex science fiction exploitation caper and according succeeds beyond expectation. Watch it and have a damn good filthy laugh !

**Web:** <http://www.stag-films.com>

**Official Site:** <http://www.myspace.com/sexgalaxy>

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## Slaughter Night SL8N8 Accent Films

Slaughter Night (SL8N8) begins with a powerful and gore filled flashback sequence set in the 19th century. Andries Martiens was a brutal serial killer who abducted and beheaded young children in the belief that this would give him entry to hell to find out where his parents had hidden his inheritance. Later in the film we learn quite a bit more about Martiens, as his life story is shown in rather superb stylized flashback historical sequences.



We learn that he was viciously mistreated as a child and escaped his parent's clutches only by becoming a sailor. His life was difficult and filled with suffering. When he returned home his parents had died and left him penniless, even though it was clear that were extremely wealthy, where had the money gone ?

In fury and anger he decides to use a voodoo black magic rite he learned on his travels to travel to Hell and confront his parents.

To achieve this end he must kill eight children and behead them. He is caught having killed seven children and with the eighth tired to a chair. As he is sentenced to death, he is given an unusual choice, he can die by hanging or to become a so-called 'fireman' in a mine. It seems that the "firemen" were dressed in relatively fire proof clothing and send deep into the mind with a flame to detect gas leaks, the prisoners were given a pardon if they survived the ensuing explosion.

In Martiens case he survived but was shot anyway and his spirit possessed by hate and fury wanders the mine.

The film itself spends a leisurely time setting up the story, there is lots of character development and an excellent backdrop is created for what comes later.

An impressive aspect to the tale is the death of Kristel's father. The car accident is unexpected and brutal and links so many aspects of the story together.

It seems her father was writing a book about Martiens and Kristel and her friends travel to Belgium to retrieve his papers. Kristel has a number of strange experiences along the way and it seems her father's spirit is watching over her, something which certainly becomes significant later in the story. These experiences are, however, ambiguous and you are not sure at times if it her father who is watching over her or perhaps someone else. It seems Kristel has a link to both her father's ghost and to Martiens.

When they arrive at the mine where Martiens met his demise, they are encouraged to go on a guided tour of the now abandoned mine. As the elevator breaks down, they are bored and listless so decide to use a Ouija board to contact Martiens. A little predictably his spirit breaks loose and begins to possess the living (and the dead), it seems he wishes to recreate his ritual and nothing will stop him.

From here on in *Slaughter Night* becomes a superbly wild slasher film. It has a lot going for it, the abandoned mine, the suffocating passages, ghosts, possessions, gore and violence murder and Kristel's father trying to help them survive from beyond the grave.

For a film which was made on a relatively moderate budget the mood, suspense and at times sheer terror is impressive. The gore and violent mayhem is very effective and the special effects cannot be faulted. The violence is used very creatively so combined with excellent editing and the claustrophobia of the mines shafts and tunnels creates an "edge of your seat" experience.

I also feel that the upcoming "European" horror films are doing something a little different. Both *Slaughter Night*, which is Dutch, and *Dead in Three Days*, which was Austrian, spend far more time than most Hollywood films developing mood and character.

They seem to take a far more leisurely approach to setting the stage for the film and used a lot of back-



ground and mood shots to help create the ambience. While each film utilizes a high level of violence, certainly more so in *Slaughter Night*, this is in the context of a large cinematic plan rather than simply for its own sake.

The cinematic style is also different, there is a more developed visual sense in each film that in most US horror releases, for example. In *Slaughter Night*, there is a regular scene where the whole mine is shown from the outside, with the dark sky behind it and smoke arising around it. This image is a powerful visual image, cold, detached and evocative and yet it has no real connection to what is occurring within the mine itself. It is simply used as a visual motif and yet is incredibly effective.

This European development of horror and to be honest Austria and the Netherlands are not known for their horror output offers a different perspective of classic horror genres such as the slasher and shows a new and innovative way forward in what was in many ways becoming a tired and clichéd form of cinema.

I think you will find *Slaughter Night* a well executed and stimulating experience.

**Web:** <http://www.myflix.com.au>

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**Spider Baby**  
**Umbrella Entertainment**  
**R4 DVD**

**Web:** <http://www.umbrellaent.com.au/>

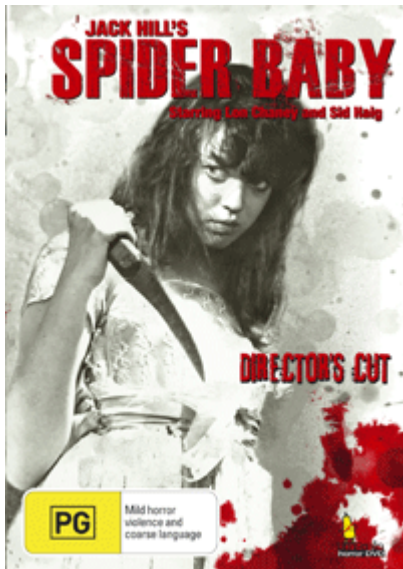
*Spider Baby* is an extremely weird film; it is a superb example of 1960's schlock cinema combining horror, comedy and just plain weirdness into one unforgettable package. Originally shot in 1964 but not released until 1968 thanks to some major financial problems, *Spider Baby* (also known under the more sensationalist titles *Cannibal Orgy* or *The Maddest Story Ever Told*) is a strange viewing experience. For many years a good copy was very hard to find so a Director's cut is a truly joyous experience.

Chauffer Bruno (played superbly by Lon Chaney) looks after a decaying and isolated gothic mansion where the very last generation of the Merrye family reside.





While wealthy, they have been cursed by a disease brought on by generations of inbreeding. It seems that when they reach the age of ten the members of the clan begin to regress, becoming more and more childlike until they cross a threshold and reach a state of "pre-human savagery and cannibalism".



All of the remaining family members are suffering from the syndrome; the most advanced are already safely locked in cells in the basement where they have literally become like animals, physically and mentally. Ralphie is the most far gone and may have to go downstairs soon, while Virginia, stunningly played by Jill Banner, thinks she is a spider and wanders the house with a net and daggers drawn waiting to "play spider". Elizabeth is the most normal of the three but is easier led and seemingly obsessed with hating everything and everyone, sadly the syndrome is slowly catching up with her as well. This is surely the Adams family meets the Texas Chainsaw Massacre, a sort of cannibal inbred version of the Munsters!

The film opens when a postman comes to make a delivery and Bruno is away. He puts his head throw a window to see if anyone is at home, since the house is in a state of decay the frame falls down and catches him. Virginia sees this as a chance to play "spider" and throwing a net over his head stabs him repeatedly, slicing off his ear before killing him. When Bruno returns he arranges for the mess to be cleaned up and opens the letter that the postman was delivering, it is from a lawyer advising that he is bringing some relatives to see the Merrye clan and they are coming today.



It seems these distant relatives have their eye on the Merrye wealth and have decided to force the children into care and throw Bruno out on the street but things don't quite turn out as planned. It seems that Virginia when confronted with danger becomes homicidal and slowly with the help of Elizabeth and Ralph their guests experience a very unusual night.

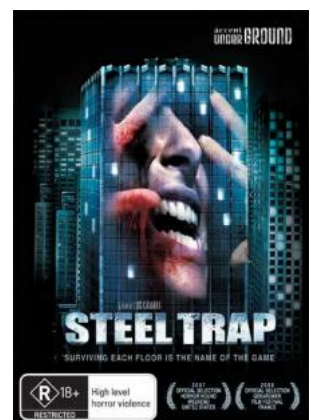
This is a superbly bizarre film, it offers beautiful black and white cinematography which has been most lovingly restored, a superb soundtrack (including a truly kooky intro song about a cannibal orgy sung by Lon Chaney himself no less) and awesome performances. Lon Chaney is cool, charming and unflappable even when the girls have slaughtered with abandon, Jill Banner is really something to see. The spider obsessed girl is a lesson in madness which is just so odd it keeps your eyes glued to the screen.

This is the full restored Director's Cut of the film and also includes some great extras. An audio commentary, a 32 minute documentary "The Hatching of Spider Baby", Spider Stravinsky on the music of Spider Baby, the Merrye House Revisited, an alternate opening sequence, an extended scene and a stills gallery.

### Steel Trap Accent Underground R4 DVD

An abandoned tower block seems a great place for a wild New Year's Party but it seems a killer has something else in mind.

A group of rather unlikeable and self obsessed party goers, each one a minor celebrity (a cooking show host, a former child star, an advice columnist, a TV executive etc) are having a less than average time at a rather bland "business" new year party on the 27th floor of an abandoned tower block, they each receive a SMS message inviting them to an exclusive party.





They can't wait to go to a "real party" and leave post haste taking an out of order elevator to the 21st floor.

When they arrive they find themselves in a strange children's like party each with place markers describing their less than admirable traits such as pig, loser, two faced, heartless and loverboy. They bicker, take drugs, flirt, argue and party on until they find a party napkin that seems to suggest a game is afoot.

Being a little less than savvy, they ignore any of the more threatening undertones to what is occurring and believing it all to be good fun begin to follow a range of clues which take the form of nursery rhymes. The first one leads them to a room with balloons and a pig's head !

Now personally I would have thought that the combination of the abusive labels and a pig's head would have been warning enough to run a mile, but no, they continue on the chase convinced this is some thought of competition, maybe even a celebrity expose with hidden cameras. (They are minor celebs, of course, and I presume they believe any publicity is good publicity).

A masked killer clad in industrial black and armed with a meat-hook begins to hunt the group, it seems the killer has planned the hunt carefully and the whole building is structured for the game with traps, clues and specially created environments.

It is also in lockdown and there is no way to escape.

The whole hunt through the corridors mixed with the psychological games and the decaying personal relations between the characters plays well.

The first killing is a real jolt and is impressively gruesome. From here on in begins what is a roller coaster ride of tension and suspense, punctuated with violent and gore ridden set pieces and nice changes in environment and setting.

By using different aspects of the building the director is able to explore different environments, so we have rooms we get unique textures to various stages of the hunt such as one corridor filled with TV sets, another like a film set, another one dark with walls covered in plastic etc.

At heart this has been done before—an isolated location with a psycho killer picking off his victims one by one. However, the use of the tower block and the cinematic opportunities it offers – long corridors, darkened offices, traps, lifts with blades etc work to make this an above average slasher.

The cinematography is well done and there are some very nice shots of the tower block at night.

Certainly the strange set pieces, weirdly decorated environments, quirky clues and the nursery rhymes give the film a nearly circus like feel, even the killer looks like a circus extra.

The ironic killings such as the "pig" being gutted and hung like a pig and the "two faced" woman being given two faces also gives Steel Trap an extra dimension and, of course, offers opportunity for blood, guts and gore.

The ending is unexpected and continues the humour to the whole film, I won't spoil it for you but it is both amusing and strange.

It is a bit of a stretch in terms of plot and while given a convoluted explanation is somewhat unconvincing, but, heh, this is a slasher film with a perverse sense of humour, so it isn't made for meaningful commentary is it ?

Steel Trap is enjoyable for what it is and offers an intriguing take on the slasher genre.

**Web:** <http://www.myflix.com.au>

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**Strange Aeons**  
**The H.P Lovecraft**  
**Collection Volume V**  
**Lurker Films**  
**Microcinema**  
**R1 DVD**



The H. P Lovecraft collection are low budget but creative adaptations of works by H.P Lovecraft. They have proved quite successful and have brought many different perspectives on the Lovecraft "mythos" to a wider audience.

Volume five primarily showcases Strange Aeons, an approximately 80 minute adaptation of the Lovecraft tale "The Thing on the Doorstep". It also offers a range of shorts as well.

In Strange Aeons we have, Richard Upton, a college professor at Miskatonic University who is teaching a course on ancient religions.





As part of this course he explores the work of his mentor Ephraim Waite, who not only found evidence of a race that predated mankind, but it seems was a priest worshipping their ancient gods. At the same time, the daughter of his mentor, Asenath Waite transfers into his course causing quite some disturbance.

She develops a relationship with Edward Derby, his assistant and slowly begins to exert an unbreakable control over him. Unknown to Richard, she has inherited abilities from her father including being able to switch bodies. It seems that her marriage to Edward has another motive, to use Richard as a means to open a dimensional rift and allow a Dark Lord to return from a dimension beyond time and space.

Strange Aeons is an interesting attempt to adapt "The Thing on the Doorstep" into a tale suitable for a modern audience and while at times the acting is a little wooden, the adaptation is intriguing and the result is certainly worth watching. It has been shot on a low budget with a digital camera but generally it does the job.

The DVD also includes a number of Shorts.

From Beyond while nine minutes in length is actually rather impressive. It is a stop motion animated tale of the classic "From Beyond" Tale. An unnamed guest is summoned to the home of a scientist named Crawford Tillinghast who has created an electronic device that sends waves which stimulate the pineal gland thus allowing a person to things not normally visible. While the guest has been sceptical of Tillinghast's achievements, he will now come to experience them firsthand.

The use of claymation certainly works well in this short and the combination of the live film on the TV



and the creatures in stop motion make this a rather innovative short.

Maria's Hubris is thirteen minutes in length and is a different adaptation of "The Thing on the Doorstep" tale. It creates an excellent mood and indeed because it presents the tale in a shorter format than the feature really sustains the suspense much better.

Lovecraft is a trailer for a doco on Lovecraft and the clip features interviews with Neil Gaiman, Peter Straub, and director Guillermo del Toro among others. This should be an amazing release.

Don't Feed the Book is a strange and somewhat amusing cartoon, but I am not quite sure of its significance here.

There are also some nice extras including an Audio commentary with the director and screenwriter of Strange Aeons, the making of "Strange Aeons", Trailers, Festival Spots and promos from the Lovecraft Film Festival, a Interview with John Carpenter about H.P. Lovecraft and a Four page full colour booklet and a Let Sleeping Gods lie, a short clip.

Strange Aeons is a mixed package but well worth watching. As with all of the H.P. Lovecraft series there is a diverse range of materials of different qualities and each of them are always excellent showcases for independent and low budget interpretations of his work.

Strange Aeons is certainly of interest and while perhaps not as strong as some of the earlier releases in the series is still an interesting viewing experience.

**Web:** <http://www.microcinema.com>

### Superstars of Horror: Christopher Lee Umbrella Entertainment 3 DVD Set

Umbrella Entertainment has so far released two Superstars of Horror Collections, Peter Cushing and Boris Karloff.



Both have been well received and offer a nice selection of key films by each actor.

The third set is Christopher Lee and includes two of his more outrageous performances in The Castle of Fu Manchu and The Bloody Judge as well as a lesser known film in "The House that Dripped Blood".

Both the Castle of Fu Manchu and The Bloody Judge were directed by Jess Franco, the celebrated

Euro cult filmmaker who has produced a vast range of work from the sublime *Vampyros Lesbos* through to the "women in jail exploitation classic" *99 Women*. He continues to direct today and it is estimated he has made some 200 films so far.

*The Castle of Fu Manchu* is a classic politically incorrect exploitation film; it was the fifth and final *Fu Manchu* with Christopher Lee playing the maniacal *Fu Manchu*. As with all the *Fu Manchu* series, the film is set in the 1920s. *Fu Manchu* has a new plan to take over the world using a device which freezes the world's oceans!

With his evil but alluring daughter, Lin Tang, his army of ninjas and some help from local criminals (who are disposable, as they learn to their peril), *Fu Manchu* takes control of the governor's castle in Istanbul which has a massive Opium reserve as well as the largest opium port in Anatolia. It seems he can derive some sort of chemical from the opium which he uses to power his ocean freezing machine (okay, the plot is rather weird).

Prof. Heracles, the scientist who designed the ice weapon has been kidnapped to get the formula to process the opium into fuel. However, there is a catch, Heracles is dying from a defective heart and the stress of his kidnapping hasn't helped him too much either. *Fu Manchu* forces the professor's doctor Dr. Kessler and his nurse Ingrid to perform a heart transplant on Heracles to get the needed formula. If they fail, it means their lives. Along the way he works at his plan to poison ten of the world's leaders using a sexy but deadly female assassins.

Of course while this going on *Fu Manchu*'s arch enemy, Nayland-Smith has tracked him to Istanbul, where Omar Pasha, a local criminal betrayed by *Fu Manchu* and Scotland Yard team up to again foil *Fu Manchu*'s plan for world domination.

This is a classic and outrageous Franco film, filled with stereotypes, sexy women and exploitation. Reviled as one of the all-time worst movies ever screened on *Mystery Science Theater 3000*, it stands the test of time as a film "so bad, its good!"



It is hard to think what could follow *The Castle of Fu Manchu*, but then we have *The Bloody Judge* and it is a true cult classic. Christopher Lee is in his cruelest role ever as the notorious 17th-century British "Witchfinder" Judge George Jeffreys, who used his position to torture and kill real or suspected enemies of the crown as well as those accused of witchcraft. He also used his position to gain sex, wealth and anything else that took his fancy.

It is 1685 and England is a divided country. King James II sits on the throne, whilst conspirators constantly plot against him. Chief Justice Judge Jeffreys supports his King unhesitatingly sending his enemies (real or imagined) to face the executioner, if he can't get them as traitors, he will get them as witches.

He is brutal, violent and cruel and without thought uses torture as the whim takes him, he seemed to take a pride in his work and relishes in savagery.

When Alicia Grey is brought before Jeffreys on suspicion of witchcraft and inevitably sent to be tortured, her sister Mary pleads for mercy.

He is willing to show clemency, but only if she will submit to his sexual advances. Horrified she refuses and flees and Alicia is burned at the stake as a witch...

*The Bloody Judge* is one of the most unusual films directed by Jess Franco in that it is a highly successful historical drama while at the same time being packed with sex, torture and all manner of exploitation. It is quite an audacious piece of cinema.







The final film in this package, The House that Dripped Blood is not really in the same class as the first two.

It was the third horror anthology produced by Amicus Productions, a British horror film house which was the only real rival to Hammer Films during the 1960s and early 1970s.

It uses a house that supposed reflects the minds of the occupants as a means to spin a number of horror and suspense tales.

It uses an old house that supposedly reflects the minds of the occupants back on them as a means to spin a number of horror and suspense tales.

The Method For Murder is an interesting twist on psychosis and madness and is really a psychological murder thriller, but is effective and tension filled.

It plays with the author and his hallucinations and the final revelation that his wife is behind it all, but what happens if her accomplice is also unstable and he confuses his role with reality ?? An ironic ending to an interesting tale.



Waxworks is a nice strange tale and Peter Cushing is outstanding in his role, the imagery of the waxworks is nicely displayed and the counter balance between the nice isolated country town and the macabre nature of the waxworks is very effective.

Sweets to the Sweet is the most impressive of the lot and has Christopher Lee playing an outstanding role as a cruel and domineering father, but is the twist in the story works well and Chloe Franks as the Witch child is truly eerie.

The final tale, the cloak, is classic horror comedy episode which is fun and packed with slapstick and humour, it is amusing but is probably the weakest of the set. While Ingrid Pitt is amusing and fun sending up her own vampire roles !

These three film together make a nice package and certainly show Christopher Lee as a versatile actor in very different roles – from an Asian criminal mastermind to a Witchfinder and then a domineering father frightened of his witch child !

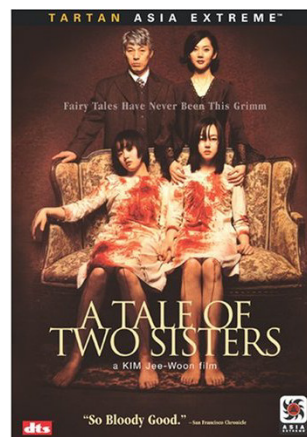
Each film is nicely mastered and packed on individual DVDs in a three DVD set.

This is another superb set from Umbrella Entertainment.

There are also some great extras including Interviews with director Jess Franco and Christopher Lee, Deleted and Alternate Scenes, TV Spot, Theatrical Trailers, Poster and Still Galleries, Talent Bios, Feature Length Commentary By Director Peter Duffell, Featurette with Director Peter Duffell and cast members Ingrid Pitt, Chloe Franks and Geoffrey Bayldon and Amicus Collection Trailers.

### **A Tale of Two Sisters Tartan Asia Extreme R1 DVD R4 Shock DVD**

A Tale of Two Sisters is a superb example of a film which crosses genres and does not really allow you to define it until the very end.



The first thing that captures you is the cinematography, this is a film filled with luscious colour, shadows and fleeting images. The house itself and the environment becomes part of the film, every corner, shadow, colour, fabric and ornament becomes significant.

Even furniture is important and the constant use of

the environment helps introduce hints about the plot before they happen (for example, reference to the wardrobe).

At the same time it is really only with a genuinely high quality edition of the film that this becomes evident. There are many releases, but the Tartan Asian Extreme release of 2005 which comes on two DVDS is the very best.

You not only get the best quality image imaginable but a DTS track which really works the surround sound. You hear doors creaking, footsteps in the distance, cupboards rattling and so on and all this sets the stage for a very strange cinematic experience. It is one of the best DTS tracks in terms of producing a subtle, moody and textured environment. It is not over the top, but uses carefully placed sounds to put you in the centre of the experience.

At first you are unsure exactly what you are watching. The house seems creepy, dark and the family is plain weird but what exactly happens is very open to interpretation. It is certainly not a traditional ghost film and is packed with psychiatric illness, family dysfunction, suicide and madness. The way in which the story unfolds keeps the viewer wondering exactly what is occurring until the last 30 minutes of the film, when, in flashbacks, we begin to get some background on the events that have led to the current disaster.

However, that being said, there is still a cross over between the seeming madness of Su-mi and what is probably a genuine haunting. The conclusion of the film seems to suggest that the step mother is killed by the ghost of Su-yeon, regardless of the hallucinatory aspects of Su-mi's breakdown.

The storyline is complex and intriguing. It seems that the husband has been having an affair with a nurse looking after the children's mother who is severely depressed due to the treatment she is receiving for cancer. In a fit of depression, she commits suicide in a wardrobe and is found by Su-yeon. Trying to revive her mother, the wardrobe falls on Su-yeon and pins her to the ground.

The nurse, unable to cope with what she sees, retreats from the scene and tries to manipulate Su-mi to intervene. In a horrific moment she tells Su-mi she will reject it if she doesn't stop and listen. Su-mi, of course, has no idea what she is talking about and in fury with the nurse trying to take her mother's place stamps from the house.

She does not realize Su-yeon is dying upstairs. Perhaps even the nurse doesn't realize the gravity of what is occurring, in any event both the mother and Su-yeon die. Su-Mi confronted with their deaths her feelings of uncontrollably guilt has a massive breakdown.



After some period of hospitalization she returns to the house to her father. At this stage he has had the sense to keep the nurse, now his wife, out of the house. However, as time progresses Su-mi's mind degenerates and she replays the events, feeling that she is still trying to protect Su-yeon from the step-mother, whom she has demonized into a major destructive figure.

While, of course, the nurse (who has now married the father) was partially to blame, it is in Su-mi's psyche that the major violent events depicted occur. She suffers a psychotic break and begins to imagine all manner of terrible tortures she believes the step-mother visited on Su-yeon, none of which are real.

However, as the film progresses there is a deliberate mixing of her psychosis with the fears of the step mother, the guilt of the father and, it seems, the revengeful ghost of Su-yeon who not only is after the nurse, but wants to save Su-mi from the suffering she is experiencing.

This is startling film, beautiful and haunting, evocatively presented with such an eye for detail.

Every scene seems like a "Zen Buddhist painting", everything is perfected placed, every gesture is significant.

There are scenes of such emotional intensity they nearly take your breath away. The ambiguity of the plot makes it all the more seductive, even when it is finished you will still debate with yourself exactly where hallucination ended and haunting began. The picture offered of human weakness frailty, family dysfunction and emotional betrayal is as powerful as the possibly supernatural aspects of the tale.

This superb two DVD edition is really the classic release. The second disc includes lots of extras ranging from interviews to a psychiatrists perspective on the film ! There are behind the scenes and post production documentaries and some hidden extras such as a letter from Su-yeon on the first DVD and one from Su-mi on the second.

The Shock R4 DVD in Australia has a similar good quality picture and the same special features but does not include the DTS soundtrack.





Before I review this film I have an admission to make. I am one of those grumpy old men; I don't like Xmas and never have. I cannot stand all those Xmas Carols, family get togethers and above all, I hate Xmas trees. I love films like Black Christmas, Silent Night, Deadly Night and Bad Santa and adore the scene in Female Trouble when Divine destroys the Christmas Tree, stomps on her Xmas presents and screams "F\*\*k you and F\*\*k Xmas". I hate Xmas so much I write it with an X !

Treevenge is the ultimate anti Xmas, Xmas Tree revenge film. It opens with redneck hicks of clearly inbred stock ravaging a plantation for Xmas Tree stock. As they do the trees cry and scream, they sound like sad little chipmunks !

It is superbly outrageous to see these trees fighting to survive and going into shock as they are placed in the van to go to the retail store, we have poor seedlings crying for their parents to protect them ! It is so pathetic, so silly and ridiculous that it actually works !

The foresters are stereotypical monsters as are the terribly evil and wicked Xmas tree sellers who seem to have glee in their eyes as they cut and main the trees ready for consumption. Insult is added to injury when a majestic tree is bought by a horrid middle class family for their "too good to be true" Xmas celebration.

The family is so sickly sweet, so sentimental, so revolting you just can't wait for the carnage to start. You see the whole film through the eyes of the tree, you feel its pain, its insult as being reduced to a bourgeois ornament, covered in tinsel and topped with a star.

As Xmas day arrives, the father tells the kids "don't worry tear the paper off" (an environmental message here) and the boy receives a little chainsaw. That's about enough for the tree and it goes wild and the family is torn apart.

From here on in bedlam reigns, one family after another is slaughtered and that triggers a revolt from all the trees.

Eyes are torn out, trees attack with axes, branches go down mouths and a big tree stamps on a baby's head ! It is war between tree and man !!

I will never look at Xmas again the same way. This is a superbly done short, beautifully shot, filled with irony, sarcasm and wit as well as packed with a wicked sense of humour and some great gore !!

Web: <http://www.yerdead.com>

Web: <http://www.myspace.com/jasoneisener>

### A Vampires Collection Umbrella Ent. 3 DVD Set

A Vampires Collection is a great set from Umbrella which combines three classic Vampire films, each offering a different interpretation of the vampire tale.

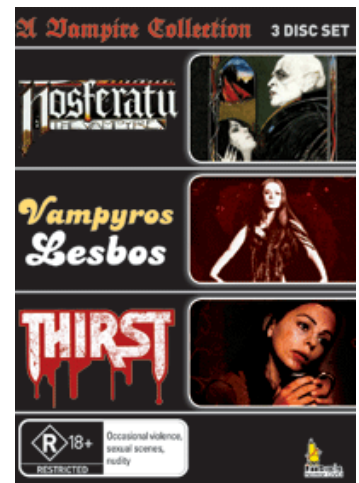
Each are considered significant within their respective genres. Nosferatu is the classic Vampire tale starring "Mad Klaus", Vampyros Lesbos by Jess Franco singlehandedly began the "lesbian vampire" erotic genre and Thirst is a classic of cult exploitation and is of special interest considering the recent attention focused Australian cult cinema.

Nosferatu is Werner Herzog's innovative re-imagining of the original German Expressionist classic by F.W Murnau, starring Klaus Kinski in one of his most impressive roles. Originally released in 1979 Herzog's Nosferatu is still considered one of the major classics of the Vampire genre and while there may be some debate, most critics consider it equal to the original for which it was made to pay homage.

The imagery of the film is stunning and it is layered with symbolism throughout, you really need to watch this film a number of times to notice all the symbols, signs and images.

The music, cinematography and the use of evocative sets create a mood of dread which is spine tingling.

The performances of both Klaus Kinski (Nosferatu) and Isabelle Adjani (Lucie) are astounding. Kinski is a truly consummate character actor and is breathtaking in this role, it would be difficult to think of anyone else who could have evoked such a performance.





It is interesting to note how Herzog interprets the Vampire myth. In Murnau the vampire is beyond emotion and compassionless, vicious and cruel.

However in Herzog's *Nosferatu* the vampire is obviously bi-sexual and filled with emotion, in many ways he represents a troubled and sad being who loves humanity but sees beyond its "moral limitations".

*Nosferatu* is a superb film to open this collection, melancholic, moody and thought provoking, it will stay with you a long time after you have seen it. Also included on the DVD is an audio commentary with director Werner Herzog and Journalist Norman Hill, the Making of *Nosferatu* and trailers.

The second film moves in a totally different direction and is considered the greatest erotic vampire film ever made - *Vampyros Lesbos* by Jess Franco.

It is an innovative adaptation of *Dracula's Guest*, by Bram Stoker and focuses on Linda Westinghouse (Stroemberg) who is haunted by strange and highly erotic dreams of an unknown woman. She works at a law firm in Istanbul and is called upon to travel to the Kalidados Islands of Asia Minor to deal with the inheritance of Princess Nadine Karody (Miranda).

When she meets Karody, she realizes she is the woman in her dreams. This is a highly erotic film filled with surreal images, sex, sado-masochism and beauty. In many ways it is just as symbolic as *Nosferatu* but in a far more explicit sense, it is marked by a superb soundtrack and the cinematography is striking. While Jess Franco has produced a lot of films and many have been less than successful, this film



stands out as one of his most beautiful yet enigmatic works.

While the first two vampire films may be classics, we now move from the sublime to the ridiculous. *Thirst* is a classic "Ozploitation" vampire classic *Thirst* !

Kate Davis finds herself in the hands of a dangerous cult whose members have kidnapped her and taken her to an isolated compound nestled in a remote forest. It is a controlled environment where discipline is rigidly enforced and it is populated by a multitude of subjugated people.

It seems they are used solely for their blood which is extracted and packaged for consumption by members of the Hyma Brotherhood, a group of people with an insatiable thirst for blood. Kate is not however used for "food", she is special. It seems she is a descendant of Elizabeth Bathory, the Brotherhood is looking to combine Kate's bloodline with its own in an effort to ensure their immortality, but Kate may not be as co-operative as they hope.

While they work hard to break her resistance with a range of strange psychological tests and rituals, she still fights against her lust for blood.

*Thirst* was made in 1978 is considered a rather significant film within the annals of Australian Ozploitation. It was directed by Rod Hardy, a well respected Australian TV director and has all the elements one would expect from late Seventies Aussie cult cinema – horror, sex, blood and a weird and strange plot.

It is nicely filmed and offers quite a unique take on vampire cinema. *Thirst* also includes an excellent commentary track with director Rod Hardy and producer Antony I. Giannane and "A Contemporary Blend" - Interview featurette with producer, Anthony I. Ginnane. The quality of the print is quite impressive, it is a brand new 16 x 9 anamorphic wide-screen transfer (aspect ratio 2.35:1).

Together these three films offer some great Vampire cinema exploring different interpretations of the myths in uniquely different genres – classic, erotic and cult !

A Vampire Collection is a nice package on 3 DVDs with some great extras. Another winner from Umbrella !



**Vampire Diary**  
**Peccadillo Pictures**  
**ALL REGION PAL**

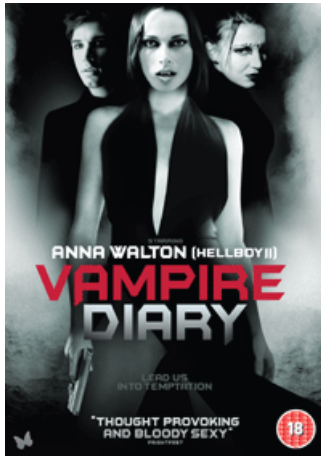
Vampire Diary is a new sort of Vampire film; it offers a post modern twist on the age old tale re-inventing the whole approach from the bottom up.

It is set within the gothic sub culture and uses the background of dark imagery, blood drinking, leather and Emo/Goth culture to excellent effect. The constant juxtaposing of the faux would-be vampires with the real violence of a vampire (of whatever nature) gives the film an intriguing series of plot turns and a good texture.

The cinematography uses a variety of styles and while I am usually a bit unsure about handheld camera work, I think the use of handheld camera, grainy footage and different stocks give the film an immediacy which suits its subject matter and style. The interchange between faux vampires, real vampires, doco filmmaking and reality all meld together nicely through the deliberate use of different film styles.

Holly (Morven Macbeth) wants to make a name for herself, she has had a hard life and believes making it big with a major doco is the key to success. She has chosen to explore the world of Goths, vampires and other dark weekend denizens. To her surprise, she meets a real blood drinker Vicki (Anna Walton). Whether Vicki is a vampire in a classic sense or just distributed is left open to conjecture through most of the film and since she kills with a bolt gun and drinks from open wounds (with no supernatural frills), we are not quite sure what she really is.

Holly and Vicki fall in love and this is rather beautifully portrayed, Vampire Diary is not lesbian vampire exploitation cinema, in many ways it mixes a poignant and touching love story with a vampire tale. As Holly and Vicki become closer, the uniqueness of their love is balanced with the brutality of Vicki's



need to feed both herself and her child, since she is pregnant after being raped by a male vampire.

Vicki's early life is shown in flashbacks and is nicely done with references to her first vampire teeth, anti social behavior and the dark life she has had to live at the edges of society. She is ultimately forced to be a predator living on predators yet even the wildest animals need love and this leads to the powerful relationship which is central to the film. It is as though two lonely souls, one human and one perhaps not, touch, meet and try to connect.

While Holly and Vicki do everything possible to avoid her killing to feed ranging from rare steaks to stealing blood and "renting" bites from the poor, ultimately she must kill and as they spin out of control into an obsessive relationship where the "baby come first", blood flows. The birth scene is quite moving and impressive, we are actually touched by the birth of the baby vampire and this play between emotional bonding and brutality is part of the film's success.

This is perhaps the first "Vampire Family Values" film ! In the end she must even sacrifice Adam to feed Vicki and the child and when Vicki is taken into custody she becomes the baby's protector. It is only in those last minutes that we realize that the Vicki was really a vampire, since the baby now must feed ...

This is an innovative and creative take on the vampire genre. It uses the background of the modern vampire sub culture to create a superbly textured environment which is also filled with great dark music. The eroticism of Anna Walton (from Hellboy II) is superb and the love scenes are convincing. In my mind this is as much a film about love and obsession as about vampires and the deliberate avoidance of any supernatural reference and the fact that you really only become convinced that Vicki and the child are vampires right at the end make this an intelligent and contemporary take on the vampire story.

**Web:** <http://www.peccapics.com>



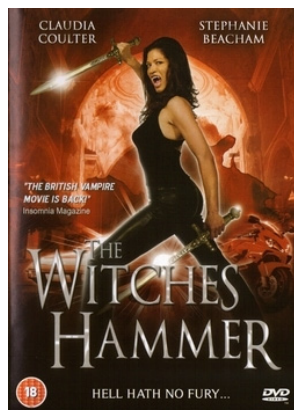
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## Witches Hammer

### Amber Pictures

### UK Release

Witches Hammer is a different sort of vampire film. It opens with Rebecca's death via vampire bite and a series of medical procedures via which she is moulded into some sort of vampire assassin under the ownership of a corporation or perhaps a secret agency.



Three weeks later, she is being questioned and we come to realize that she has been recruited by Project 571 to work as a genetically enhanced vampire assassin. It seems only a vampire can successfully fight other vampires and she is the one chosen for the task. She has lost her family and while she is free to leave she realizes that to have any real contact leaves them at risk due to her new "tastes". This recurring theme is a nice "human" touch throughout the film and hence takes to the task at hand.

While she has greatly superior abilities, she still needs lots of martial arts and weapons training and must avoid decapitation, heart piercing and too much sunlight.

This new approach to the vampire legend has a lot of potential, crossing genres and exploring new territory by mixing horror, spy and assassin stories and martial arts. This is certainly an interesting mix which is easy on the eye and jam packed with action. There is lots of hand to hand combat, weapons, vampires against vampires and, of course, the righteous vampire babe !

While Witches Hammer is a relatively moderate budget film and at times some of the special effects and CGI could have done with some extra funds, what has been achieved is really quite outstanding. The acting is reasonable, the plot is intriguing and the sheer creativity of the ideas behind the Witches Hammer and the way it crosses genres makes it a enjoyable and action filled romp.

The various missions that Rebecca undertakes are a mix between super assassin "Jane" Bond and vampire martial arts warrior and they work exceptionally well. The fact that they used UK Premier martial artist Kris Tanaka shows, the action looks real and really makes these scenes convincing. At the same time there is a sense of "play" it is a film that doesn't attempt to take itself "too seriously", it does not rely on heavy sex, gore and nudity but uses a good old action formula mixed with updated vampire lore and humour to boot !

The story moves into all sorts of unusual directions with the murder of Rebecca's team and her recruit-

ment to Project 572 which has a focus on dealing in Witches. We end up with all sorts of conspiracies, sorcery, occult texts and spells. All these various elements are nicely interwoven and create quite a layered plot.

The comedy elements work well and The Witches Hammer does have a dry sense of wit and humour. There is also some amusing slapstick and many of the fight scenes, such as the frying pan scene are impressive, offering humour as well as head to head combat.

Witches Hammer is an ambitious film, working cross genres and in different moods. It is a comedy, a horror and an assassin action film with martial art elements. This is an adventurous and creative approach to the vampire tale and one which I think shows a lot of creativity. It is certainly worth watching and offers a fun and entertaining new approach to an old tale.

Web: <http://www.amberpictures.co.uk/>

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## Witches Night

### Hay Moon Pictures

### R1 DVD



Witches Night opens with some sort of ceremony. A group of what one presumes to be witches are grinding and dancing around a male victim spread-eagled on a table. At one point one of the witches heats up a long poker and he receives it in the most unpleasant manner, so opens Witches Night.

With the witches in the background, we find a group of young men escaping to the country. It seems that Jim has been jilted at the altar by his fiancé and his mates have decided to take him away from the city for a good time with some booze, drugs and maybe some broads, if they can find any.

We are introduced to a motley crew, Jim, the rather young and inexperienced would be husband, his brother, divorced and living on cheap booze and pot, making his living in a dead end job. Rick, a rather aggressive and questionable strip club owner and Ted, the married man. The film creates a nice easy going mood between these characters which seems credible and believable, the acting is solid and for a while it seems like a strange buddy film. There is lots of smart dialogue, mate talk and humour which cements the bonds of friendship which will be strained later in the film.

However, when they go to a local store to get some more beer, of which they are constantly running out,



the owner has a cross drawn in salt on the table and strange items hanging around the store, he also seems to have a book on witches he is studying. There are a range of subtle visual clues set into the film which hint at future horrors.

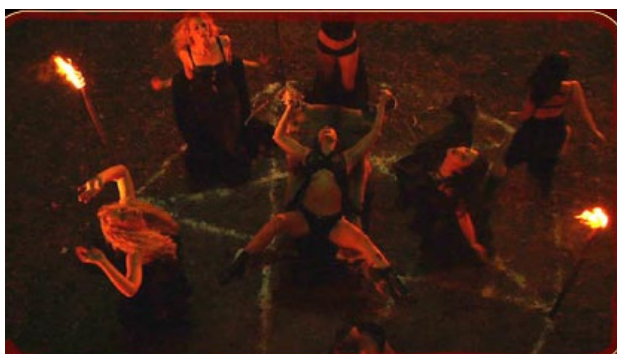
The store sets the tone for this film, carefully created and textured mood pieces which use the environment, colour, light and inference to get across the message. It uses limited special effects and relies on solid acting, character development and plain old suspense and from these it weaves a very successful tale.

Looking for something to do, they meet a local woman Marge (Betsy Baker of Evil Dead) who rents them some canoes to go down river and this is where things get weird. During their first night of partying they meet four young woman but they are nothing like any of them have encountered before. These women are not only sexually aggressive but seem to have a resonance with nature, they seem earthy and pagan and seem to ridicule the men's emotional and sexual pretensions.

This constant "conflict between the sexes" runs through the film and gives it an added depth. From Jim being left at the altar to the men's sexism, to the women's native sexual paganism and later Sapphic worship of the Horned God, there is a constant thread exploring male female dynamics.

When the men awake in the morning everything has changed, they cannot remember the night before and each one has a re-occurrence of earlier illnesses. Ted is going blind, Bill is crippled with a stomach illness while Rick is becoming more and more addicted to sex and violence. Jim is the only one resisting the spell but his arm is already scarred and things are going downhill.

The film is a great example of careful editing and suspenseful filmmaking. It uses very few special effects and the first real shock in terms of a body (putting aside the one right at the beginning) appears at around the 50 minute mark. While there is some solid action and some gore, a lot is left to the imagination. Indeed I would suggest most of the film works by using shadows, colour, light and sound, by hinting rather than showing and this is certainly an impressive achievement.



The climatic ceremony is again impressive by using careful editing and lighting and a great strong drum sound track, it creates a real sense of wild abandon with a limited number of props, primarily masks.

The conclusion of the film with the confrontation between Jim and the Witches is interesting, perhaps a little anti-climatic but overall satisfying. I found this an innovative and creative film which relied on the good old skills of storytelling, plot, character and mood to create a suspenseful viewing experience.

#### Special offer for Synergy readers:

Visit <http://www.witchesnight.com>

and enter code "samhain" and you will get an extra \$2.00 off !

#### Zombie Commando Maximum Uncut Productions Region 0 PAL



This is a wild gorefest zombie film made on a limited budget from the Outtake team from Germany. It seems a scientist working for an illegal lab operating in Russia has gone crazy and escaped into the snow covered countryside aiming to destroying it. However, the leader of the team sent to retrieve the deadly Z-Virus has other plans and has decided to sell it on the black market for big bucks. He kills the remaining member of his team and escapes. But things don't go his way, the container holding the virus has been damaged and the virus is released, now transformed into a flesh eating zombie the madness begins. However, he is not the only one, the virus has leaked into the river and there is a horde of flesh eating undead out of control in a local forest, killing, eating and infecting others.

The Delta Team are sent in to clean up the mess and there is mayhem along the way. Packed with gore, splatter and buckets of blood, this is extreme entertainment from Germany. Sure, it is made on a budget and the acting leaves a lot to be desired, but hell, it is lots of fun with lots of action, gore and even some attempts at comedy. The special effects and gore are surprisingly well done and it is rather successful for what it attempts to be – it doesn't take itself too seriously and revels in its B grade zombie status !

Zombie Commando is well filmed with a great soundtrack including music by A-Team, Project Peacemaker, Pop Brut and Women's Wardrobe. It has German audio with English subtitles.

Web: <http://www.maximumuncut.de>

**Zombie Love**  
**All Region DVD**  
**Available Direct**

Zombie Love has everything you would expect from a musical, great songs, love found, tested and nearly lost, friends who stand in the way and an everlasting finale. There is all the tension of wondering whether you have found the right person, the secrets, worries and final revelations.



However, there is one major difference, they meet in a graveyard and her suitor is a Zombie !

The exuberance of the gore and flesh eating only helps to reinforce the romantic nature of the plot and music. The acting is solid, the dialogue amusing, the plot fun and entertaining and the vocal range of all the characters is certainly impressive.

It is all the more amusing as you watch the poor Zombie attempting to look human, trying to avoid eating flesh and being "coy" about his sexual desires as he doesn't want to reveal his "true nature". His immortal buddies are also a hoot since they have been around for eternity and like any buddies they are rather put out by the fact that he now has a babe. The irony is amusing, it seems even Zombies have very human problems.

This is a remarkably professional short musical packed with great choreography, superb songs and all sorts of witty and outrageous dialogue. I especially like the discussion of why he shouldn't fall in love with a human since humans are only meat and he is reminded that when he was alive surely he did not try to philosophise with a cow !

The music is really quite outstanding and makes this even more of a riot to watch - Westside Story with Zombies—too much !

There are some great songs in Zombie Love ranging from the Zombie Disco Number "Eat the Flesh" to a wild Bollywood Zombie love song.

Zombie Love is an absolute romp and the DVD includes a range of extras such as deleted scenes, outtakes, behind the scenes and preview trailers such as Zombie Rap !

**Web:** <http://www.zombielovethemovie.com/>

**Want to chance to win a copy of this DVD ?**

See our Competitions page !

**Zombie Strippers**  
**Sony Pictures**  
**R1 DVD October 2008 Release**

Zombie Strippers is an astoundingly original and taboo breaking horror film. Combining a strong satirical sense of humour with an abundance of gore, violence and sexuality it creates an over the top viewing experience. At times it seems more like a cross between a Fulci Zombie film, Gordon's Re-animator and Show Girls with some solid nudity thrown in for good measure.

The film opens with a newsreel outlining the current state of the world. George Bush has been re-elected once again and wars are being raged through the world by the new imperialist US. In an attempt to keep up the demand for soldiers, a viral agent has been developed which re-animates soldiers after death and keep them fighting. There is a drawback, slowly the body and brain decays and what is left is a rotting shell which hungers for fresh. The lab testing the virus is called W and run by Bush and Cheney (hints of Walburton here ?) and the political satire runs deep throughout the film.

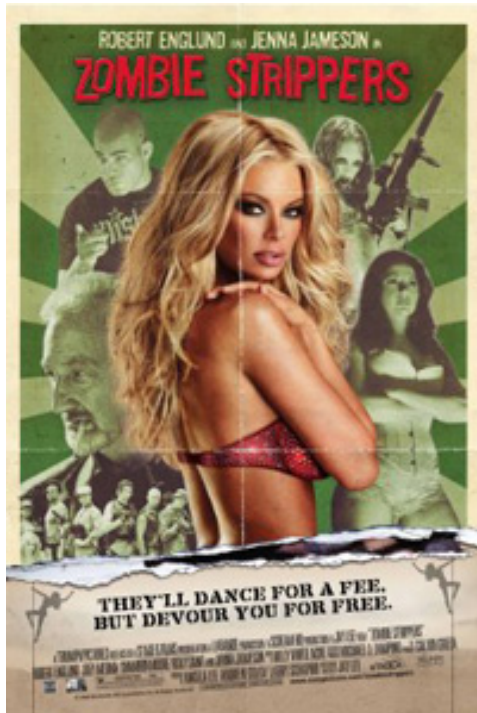
Of course, American security as it is, the virus escapes and zombies are roaming the military facility. This is, of course, not the original, it has been done many times before and while the satire is fun, nothing stands out, until what comes next.

When one of the soldiers is bitten, to avoid being shot, he escapes and lands in an illegal and underground strippers establishment run by a nasty money grabbing boss Ian Essko played admirably by Robert Englund (Good on your Freddie!). The strippers are putting on quite a show with the "super stripper" being none other than Jenna Jameson. But she is no normal stripper; she is educated in the work of Fredrich Nietzsche and sees stripping as part of her warfare against human normality (!).

This strange philosophical bent runs throughout the movie, the town itself is called Sartre and the young would be stripper is a Christian having moral quandaries about whether to strip to gain money for her grannies colostomy surgery!







This isn't forgetting the young Goth and the bosses wife who sounds like Elvira but is named Madame Blavatski (a 19th century Russian occultist !). There is a constant educated dialogue between the strippers (and others) on the meaning of life and the nature of existence. This philosophical tone (and the humour and satire) gives the movie an edge which is unusual in what could characteristically be seen as a zombie sex gore film.

Above all, however, we need to be honest and say that the power of the film is in the sex and gore. The first scene which really blows you out of the water and sets the tone for the rest of the film is when Jenna Jameson is bitten on the neck by the soldier. She then turns into "zombie super stripper" and puts on the strip of her life. Covered in blood with her throat ripped out she takes to the pole and in a outrageous performance which mixes gore, sex and blood, she wows the crowd (and for that matter, the viewer as well).

This combination of nudity, sex, blood, gore and death is certainly one that will confront the censors and I will be surprised if it is not "tamed down" for Australian release. As the strippers become infected, each one takes on a new persona and the gore girls take to the stage, each one trying to outstrip the others.

Of course there are also subtle observations, the audience, hooked on sensation, are not longer interested in the "living" strippers and only want zombie flesh ! So the girls fall to the allure of being undead and compete for the attention of the audience. Who, by the way, they are also eating and turning into zombies along the way (with lots of sex = meat jokes along the way).

The two themes which run through these sequences are the way in which the mob, fascinating and repelled at the same time, become addicted to watching the undead strippers.

It has a lot of resonance with the way in which society as a whole is addicted to crime TV and disaster, a sort of vicarious obsession with violence and death and when presented with sex as well, the hook is the strongest. This, of course, is quite an intelligent social commentary, carefully scripted into what on the surface could be seen as simply a zombie film.

The other theme which is of interest is the way in which the strippers, exploited and used by Ian Essko, have become so desensitized that they fight among themselves to be the best undead zombie stripper and even give themselves voluntarily to be bitten so they can join the new craze !

This leads to one of the more outrageous sequences when the two main strippers, each jealous of the other's success, attack each other with everything they have got. This battle starts with ping pong and then billiard balls shot from the obvious orifice and climaxes with them trying to tear each other to pieces!

This is truly glorious entertainment – it has everything – sex, death, blood, gore, social commentary, biting satire, a superb script, amazing special effects, solid acting, strippers and nudity, it is amazing how much you can pack into one film !

The film begins and ends with a strong satirical message as we realize that the government has set the virus loose themselves as they make big bucks off the disaster. It seems the "W" manipulates what occurs to they can make profits from the solutions and these range from the creation of medical problems to war.

We get an eloquent speech from the secret government agent who gives us the straight facts and even tells us that not enough youngsters are smoking, just before he is bitten by a zombie head that is left in a bag of body parts. Ahh! The Irony.

This is one awesome film– sex and death have never looked so damn good !



# THINKING TIME!



**Australian Atheist**  
**Atheist Foundation of Australia**  
**Web:** <http://www.atheistfoundation.org.au/>

The Atheist Foundation of Australia is an organization promoting the worldview that “there is no credible scientific or factually reliable evidence for the existence of a god, gods or the supernatural”. While personally I have never had a problem with such a definition of Atheism I have always worried about putting things in the negative – perhaps it could be said that Atheism works from the premise that “nothing should be accepted without being proved by the scientific method”.

Atheism is becoming a major issue today as we see the inroads that religion and superstition is once again making into our lives. While the Sixties and to a lesser extent Seventies was a period when many of us hoped the shackles of superstition would fall away, alas, we hoped too soon and it seemed that as the years went on our culture has become more and more irrational. Not only was there a resurgence in Christian belief (especially in emotionally fringe sects as the Pentecostals), but a cultural acceptance of all manner of “weirdness” from alternative medicine to the new age.

Of course with the advent of violent fundamentalism the far right and religious conservatives had the ultimate weapon and using the fear of terrorism the conservative revolution of John Howard and George Bush took control and put religion back on the map.

Too often it we see the media talking about the danger of “fundamentalists” and “terrorists” without realizing that any superstitious or irrational belief is only a breath away from violence. As soon as we jettison reason, anything is possible. Have a nice quite talk to

any supposedly non violent conservative about Abortion or gay marriage and you will quickly find out what I mean ! All the talk about protecting babies and stopping the decay of marriage seems to simply underlie a violence personal demand the world accept their values – or else.

It is too easy to be tolerant, for example, of alternative medicine—what can seemingly be wrong with an alternative cancer cure ? That is until we realize the terrible cost in human suffering as the weak and the infirm are exploited by either the money hungry or the self deceived, depending on how charitable you wish to be about their motives.

As someone with a health background, I am shocked by the horror stories I hear about supposed treatments sold an exorbitant prices to those in the most vulnerable of situations.

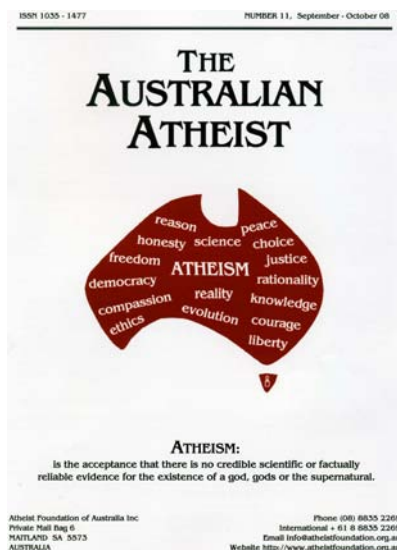
*For me Atheism is not a choice but an ethical imperative.*

At last with the work of Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris and others the debate is squarely back on the map and the Atheist Foundation of Australia is working to both promote Atheism and to fight against infringements of our freedom by those of religious (and spiritual) persuasions of all sorts. We need to move base to an rational and evidence based approach to government policy and to promote a truly scientific worldview in schools and I am pleased to see the Atheist Foundation of Australia standing up and saying what needs to be said.

The Australian Atheist is published bi-monthly and includes excellent articles, news, columns such as Heretical Happenings and reviews; it is not all heavily going and has a good sense of humour with some fun articles and cartoons as well.

Their website offers a free associate membership with a pdf of an issue of The Australian Atheist, it is well worth a look as it also includes lots of articles, links, background information and other pertinent material.

I am very pleased to have found the Atheist Foundation of Australia and commend it to you as an organisation that deserves our support.





**American Carny  
True Tales from  
the Circus Side-  
show  
Cinema Epoch  
R1 DVD**

American Carny: True Tales from the Circus Sideshow is an informative and entertaining look at the world of the sideshow through the eyes of Todd Robbins. Robbins is a sideshow phenomenon, not only does he swallow swords and eat light globes, but he has an encyclopaedic knowledge of the heritage and history of Carny life and the Sideshow.

Through the lens of his life we come to appreciate how the sideshow developed from the initial vision of P.T Barnum to Coney Island and beyond. There are some great historical images which have been rendered into three dimensional animations, so we get a real feel for the "freak shows" used in these original acts. Robbins makes it clear that such a term was not derogatory, but that the freaks were indeed the royalty of the Sideshow. Indeed, the "Freaks" were the best paid and the most respected since it was for them that most people paid their dime to enter the tent.

While there are man-made freaks (body mods, Tattoos) and skilled Carny folk (such as Robbins), it was the uniquely different characters which really made these earlier shows. This does not diminish the skills of Robbins and other folk, but does put the earlier "Freak Shows" in context.

Along the way we get introduced to a wide range of fascinating Carny folk who are working to keep the Sideshow alive. There is Jennifer Miller - The Woman with a Beard, Harley Newman "The Professional Lunatic" who commits all manner of bodily manner on stage including lying on a bed of four nails only !

We also meet Chris McDaniel who puts on a one-man Wild West Show with ropes and knives and the one and only Great Nippulini, a man who has hugely elongated and pierced nipples from which he hangs all manner of objects from anvils to bowling balls— a truly cringe worthy performance !

We also meet Carny historians such as James Taylor who edits the only Sideshow magazine "Shocked and Amazed" as well as Ken Harck of the Brothers Grimm Sideshow and Dick Zigun of the Coney Island Sideshow.



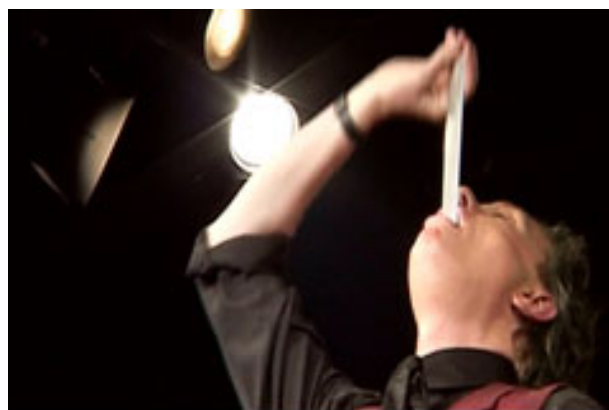
There is some great sideshow footage including some breathtaking acts ranging from the swallowing of an "eclectic light sword" by Robbins to the hanging weights of Nippulini and we get to see segments of Robbins "Carnival Knowledge" show which had a hugely successful run and which combines the history of the sideshow with sideshow acts and performances—a truly carny edutainment experience.

One of the nicer aspects of this documentary is the personal touch, we come to see the Carny folk as real "flesh and blood" outsiders not simply as performers. Todd Robbins' wedding, for example, which was a sideshow get together really brought home the unique "family" these performers had among themselves and the high respect they had for old timers with attendees ranging from old timers to Pen Teller.

This is a well made documentary which weaves together aspects of Robbins career, Carny and Sideshow history and reflections, profiles of modern Sideshow performances and a call to keep the Carny art forms alive.

It is entertaining, informative and at times will make you cringe and maybe even cover your eyes. Ultimately it left me a little sad, there seemed to be so much amazing heritage, so much fascinating entertainment in this form which, while loved by many, and devoted to by some, is slowly being lost to time.

**Web:** <http://www.cinemaepoch.com/>





## **The Houdini Code** **Reel Time Images** **R1 DVD**

Harry Houdini is still considered to be the greatest escape artist and illusionists of all time. His ability to escape from chains, watery prisons, chests, cages and life threatening situations thrilled a generation until his early untimely death.

In 2008 I do not think we really appreciate how much of a media celebrity he was at the time nor do we realize how central the issue of spiritualism was to both the media and culture and personally to Harry Houdini.

Houdini was a skeptic, while always acknowledging the possibility of the "more than the physical", he was shocked and dismayed by the cheap tricks used by spiritualists to convince their patrons of life after death and, of course, make a quick buck. After his mother's death his campaign against the exploitation of the weak became a crusade and this continued right through to his death.

He studied the subject intensely and undertook scientific analysis of mediums and their séances and proved without a fraction of a doubt that they were using the same "tricks of the trade" that any magician used, except to commit fraud and, along the way, cause emotional suffering.

He came to believe that not only were the spiritualists causing great financial stress for their clients, but were causing real emotional and psychological damage by not allowing their clients to accept death and grieve in a natural way.

Houdini's battle against spiritualism was a very public war for "critical thinking" involving clashes with many public figures including Arthur Conan Doyle, who while creating the arch rational detective Sherlock Holmes was actually a staunch psychic believer himself!

In the spirit of open minded enquiry Houdini regularly created codes with his friends that could be used after death, if it was possible, to prove the existence of the afterlife.



Sadly this led to one of the most disreputable elements of the Houdini story.

After his demise, with his wife Bess still in a state of extreme grief, consoling herself with alcohol and occasional drugs, she was manipulated by Arthur Ford, the charismatic spiritualist medium, to believe that Houdini was communicating from beyond the grave.

Never mind that the message he gave could easily have been established from published articles of the period and information provided by Bess. Even today spiritualists and others like to claim that this case finally provided proof of survival after death and that Houdini became a believer in the post mortem state.

What is the real story regarding the Houdini Code ?

This hour long documentary offers a well researched balanced but critical examination of the case with interviews with historians, illusionists and those who continue to debunk those who exploit the gullible. It is also filled with rare photographs, film and images from Houdini's life and career as well as from this early period of spiritualist excess.

The Houdini Code is an well produced documentary with clear narration and intelligent and insightful content and considering that today there are still quite a large number of books on the market claiming the truth of the "Houdini Code" it has a very pertinent and significant message !

You can see a sample clip at the Reel Time Images website as well as details of their other documentaries.

**Web:** <http://www.reeltimeimages.ca>



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## In My Skin Siren Visual R4 DVD

"It is through my body that I am in the world, that I am connected with others. If I am no longer my body, what am I?"

Where does this desire come from to want to see what the body is and if I am 'inside'?"

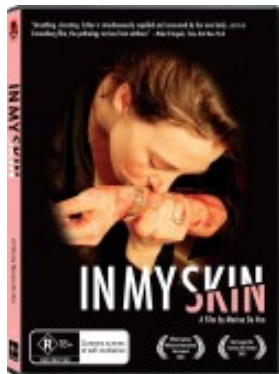
**Marina De Van**

In My Skin is compelling exploration of the world of the cutter or self mutilator. In psychological literature it has been found that, under stress, the art of inflicting self harm can refocus the attention and hence alleviate symptoms of anxiety. In a more simple (an certainly less damaging) way, a person may flick an elastic band on the wrist to arrest anxiety during the process of giving up tobacco. During depression a small group of people will using cutting as a way to distract attention from their internal state and this can accelerate to acts of increased self harm.

In this powerful exploration of self harm, Esther is an ambitious businesswoman in her early Thirties, but she is clearly under stress. As you carefully analyze the first scenes, she seems out of touch with herself, there is a lack of real intimacy in her relationship and her ambition seems to be obsessive in quality.

After attending a office party, she falls and cuts her leg and this event is the catalyst for a slow descent into self harm. As she lies in the bathroom with her leg bleeding the pain provides a period of clarity, her focus become intensely focused on the pain and her mental confusion and obsessions are dissolved. When she finally goes to the hospital for treatment, her lapse in time, so to speak, is written off as shock.

However, as the pressures of her new job, increased intimacy with her boyfriend and desire for achievement increase she finds that using acts of self mutilation



again help her focus. These are shown in quite graphic detail and the power of the image matched with the emotional intensity of the scenes make this a very powerful presentation. Slowly she becomes disassociated from her body, as in the restaurant, she sees parts of her body as "separate from her" and hence tries to use various means of self harm to regain control. As each of these events occurs, the acts of self harm increase.

As time progresses she finds her only immediate experience of the world is through the sensations caused by these acts and she distances from her partner and those around her. This removes the limits to her behavior and as she descends into a mental abyss she books into a motel so she can take her desires further.

This is a unsettling and confronting performance, covering many different psychological domains such as self image, obsession, self harm and the lack of intimacy. There are times when you want to look away but cannot; you are brought directly and personally through so many of the issues which underlie the emotional pain so many experience.

There are times when it seems to border on a horror film, yet by sustaining a constant emotional directness and a foundation in reality, it creative a level of intimacy which is hard to ignore.

While most people will not go to the depths that Esther does, many will relate to some degree to her fears and emotional struggles and it is through this empathy that In My Skin strikes home.

In My Skin is beautifully filmed and the acting is brutally honest and direct, it is a ultimately a difficult yet rewarding cinematic experience.

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**Jack Parsons**  
**Jet Propelled Antichrist**  
**Reel Time Images**  
**Web:** <http://www.reeltimeimages.ca>

The story of Jackson Parsons reads like a film noir movie script, except that it is all real. Parsons was a highly creative and intelligent self taught scientist who formed JPL (Jet Propulsion Labs) and with a select group of individuals literally brought the idea of the rocket from science fiction into the real world.

At the same time he was a ideological maverick, a student of the strange and eccentric religious system of Aliester Crowley known as Thelema and lived a open alternative lifestyle with multiple partners and an open approach to sexual exploration - all this in the 1930's and 40's !

Parsons also seemed to attract disaster, early in his career he provided advice to the court against a number of local policemen and their underlings, who





according to evidence, were blowing up those who stood in their way or in the way of their local mayor or in the way of their local mayor. He also worked "magick" with L.Ron Hubbard (yes, that LRH of Scientology fame), who, if the records are correct took off with Parson's woman and \$20,000 he had conned from him.

The last fact is hotly disputed by Scientology today who claim Hubbard was working against Parson's on behalf of Navy intelligence, an interesting claim, if only there were a shred of evidence to prove it !

The upshot of all this was that after a series of bizarre occult experiments and periods of mental instability, Parsons was killed in an explosion in his home lab in 1952. The question of why he died is still open to debate.

Theories range from the accusation of murder levelled at the police chief he put behind bars (who was released three days before Parson's death) to government conspiracies, unsafe chemical handling to "occult forces".

This fascinating documentary examines the wild and eccentric life of Jack Parsons, his unique contribution to science and technology and his obsession with the strange beliefs of Aleister Crowley as well as his membership of the esoteric organisation the O.T.O.

It includes interviews with key figures including historians, scientists, current members of the O.T.O and includes scenes from this orders occult rites including the Gnostic mass. Interviewees include Adam Parfrey of Feral House books and Lon Milo DuQuette, a well known occultist and author.

Jack Parsons Jet Propelled Antichrist is very professionally made, once again Reel Time has made a documentary which clearly is the result of solid research, rather than sensationalize an already controversial subject, it offers lots of good background on both the science and radical spirituality of a significant figure in the history of modern rocketry.

Jack Parsons Jet Propelled Antichrist is also packed with rare photographs, original footage and images, interviews and fascinating ritual sequences.

## The Naked Feminist Louisa Achille

The Naked Feminist is a fascinating and informative exploration of the world of adult entertainment from the perspective of the many woman artists, performers and directors involved. It is great to see a film handle such a controversial yet significant subject in a professional, intelligent and yet at the same time amusing and entertaining manner.



I have always found it strange that some feminists argue that adult material is by its nature exploitative and that all sex shown on screen involves objectification. While it cannot be debated that there is a flood of material that is of low quality and of dubious value, even titles which are exploitative, misogynist and downright nasty, to use this content to argue against all adult material is like arguing that a bad novel invalidates all novels or a bad film invalidates the film industry as whole. Such generalizations are bad logic and are always ending being the basis for not only faulty judgement making but prejudice.

The central thesis of the Naked Feminist is that there is clearly a difference between individuals who may be exploited, and in any industry such events will always occur, and the empowered woman who takes charge of her own sexuality and makes her own career choices. This is an unusual documentary in that it really offers a counter balance to the extreme puritanism that is found hiding under the cloak of so many feminist debates on adult materials.

The Naked Feminist offers interviews with major figures including a good overview of the development of female operated adult video companies and adult material made by woman including Club 90. Club 90 developed primarily from a group of adult woman performers and from this nexus developed such ground breaking work as the sex performance art of Annie Sprinkle and the Femme products by Candida Royalle which are sex positive erotica for couples.

This is an intelligent documentary which offers a solid balance of interviews including insightful discussion with a wide range of adult performers, recent and older and various academic and commentators. Many of the interviews and commentaries are not only informative but fun as well.

There is an insightful discussion of the Madonna/Whore complex, where woman must be either a mother, pristine and pure or a whore and the way in



which men can be studs but sexually active woman are automatically demonized as sluts.

The Naked Feminist is not a “gloss” job, it discusses honestly the misogyny of some aspects of the adult industry especially Gonzo films and the prevalence of lowest common denominator porn, but also argues that in a truly free society we must allow freedom of speech to control the market as long as no one is directly coerced or harmed.

The Naked Feminist does give some coverage to “traditional” feminist critiques of pornography, but to be honest these were not especially convincing. While they argue they were not against “nudity” only exploitation, there was a sense these were people “out of time” arguing a very Victorian view of relationships without any real honest re-appraisal of the modern experience of human sexuality.

The Naked Feminist is a superior documentary offering a good overview of the adult movie industry from the perspective of the empowered female. I felt that one of the most sensible observations in the whole film was so simple yet so imperative “the answer to bad pornography is good pornography!”.

The Naked Feminist argues, rightly so, that woman (indeed everyone male, female, gay, straight and whatever !) must reclaim their sexuality and if they do not like what they see depicted on film, they should make it themselves and in the Naked Feminist, we find that they have done just that !

**Web:** <http://www.myspace.com/nakedfeminist>

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### **Snuff: A film about Killing on Camera Killing Joke Films**

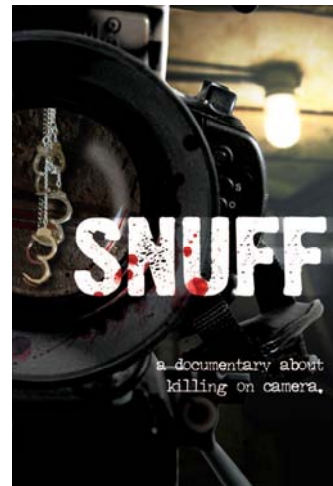
**Web:** <http://www.killingjokefilms.com/snuff.html>

Snuff: A film about Killing on Camera is a fascinating and clever examination of killing on film, it offers some of the best “critical thinking” about violence on film I have seen in a documentary.

It begins by exploring the traditional rumours of “Snuff Films”, films which are supposedly made of real killings to be sold in the market for profit. It explores the various stories about such films including the propaganda use of their supposed existence by both feminists and the far right. It shows how these rumours primarily evolved from early horror films but that even after 20 years of FBI research, no such films have actually found to be in existence.

Classic examples of supposed snuff films which end up being proved to be fakes include the infamous 1976 film “Snuff” which was originally called “Slaughter” but which to tap into urban rumours about Snuff films had a new ending tacked on and its title changed. It caused instant controversy as the

unthinking public and media went into a frenzy believing it to be real. Other similar films included Cannibal Holocaust which tapped into both the public disgust and fascination with supposed Snuff films. Also covered are such “pseudo” shockumentaries as Faces of Death which mixed news footage with faked set pieces and which, it was rumoured, made more profit than Star Wars !



Snuff also discusses the way in which “fake” violence within a horror film can provide a safe environment to explore forbidden and taboo subjects within a narrative and hence offer a cathartic experience.

At the same time Snuff: A film about Killing on Camera is not just about supposed “Snuff” films. What makes it most interesting (and challenging) is that it extends the debate to examine the whole issue about killing on film. This is where the documentary becomes confronting and truly thought provoking. It seems to me it is too easy to denounce violence within cinema (i.e. fictional film) as a way of diverting attention from the inherent violence which occurs in real life and ends up being presented as a media product. So while our governments (especially Australian) censor violent and extreme cinema, at the same time we are bombarded with violent images in the news and desensitized by images of crime and war when it suits their purposes, whether it be for increased social control or justification of a military strategy.

After Snuff examines the issues of violence in cinema and film and demolishes the myths and legends, it then begins to explore the real issues and these are far more uncomfortable.

In Mark’s story (sections one and two) Snuff explores real films made for collectors as an extension of the child exploitation industry. These are made “to order” by private collectors (many in the West) and involve the torture, mutilation and at times, killing of children. The evidence presented is persuasive and shocking and based on UK intelligence agency research. This is a significant section as it presents the reality rather than the fiction, rather than supposed mass market product (where bluntly special effects would make a death look more “real” than a “real” death), we have depraved individuals paying for a product just because it shows a real death.

Snuff then continues this exploration into the world of serial killers who use videotape to record their acts of violence. Including interviews with experts and detectives, Snuff explores the pathology of such events and how again these tapes are not made for “commercial” gain but for the personal and obviously disturbed motives of the individuals involved as part of their “patterned” obsessive behaviour. This is a powerful section and includes carefully edited footage from key cases.

The exploration of war, news and killing on film is one of the most interesting sections of the whole documentary. It examines the way in which war footage is used so pervasively in the media that it actually desensitizes us to the inherent violent nature of war. In the case of Iraq, it has the opposite effect to how we would traditionally understand snuff, it desensitizes the viewer to such an extent that the killing becomes common place and insignificant. The news shows these distant shots of supposed targeted killings where a bomb is dropped and the target vanishes as through there is no killing involved. Somehow there is a difference between the one on one slaughter of an individual during a battle and the targeting of an individual using a bomb, yet the result is the same. Our perceptions are manipulated, we see the killing as observers, detached and unaffected, we see violent killings and yet somehow these are acceptable because they are news, documentaries and media. This section offers some fascinating observations but be warned it also includes some of the footage being discussed so be prepared for a shock.

Snuff: a film about killing on camera is controversial and challenging. It deliberately takes the traditional debate about snuff films and uses it as a jumping off point to explore issues relating to the role of killing in the media especially in relation to crime and war.

By doing so it discusses highly significant issues about killing and violence on camera in an informative and thought provoking manner.

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**War Made Easy**  
**How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death**  
**Media Educational Foundation**  
**DVD**  
**Web:** <http://www.mediaed.org/>

Narrated by Sean Penn and developed from Norman Solomon's 2005 book by directors Loretta Alper and Jeremy Earp, War Made Easy is an impressive documentary focusing on role of media in government, peace and war. There are lots of anti war docos these days and while most of these have a lot to say, it is too easy to be put off by constant polemics and at times, well meaning but meandering arguments.

War Made Easy takes a different approach, offering what is primarily a media analysis of the packaging

of war marketing by both the press and the government.

This approach is very different from the vast majority of docos presently on the market and pays dividends. It is informative and communicates extremely well. While certainly it has a critical view of the United States foreign policy ranging from Vietnam to Iraq, the approach is not to make a “value judgment” about the military actions involved, but to focus on whether the American public were really given enough information to make a educated decision about the nature of the conflict.

This focus on the media, government spin doctoring and the nature of democracy is insightful and in many ways cuts to the quick about United States foreign policy. The issue becomes one of transparency and honest, rather than one about “doves” and “hawks”.

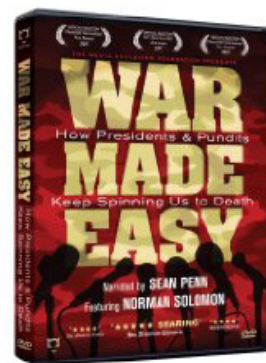
One of the more interesting discussions in the film is on the fact that during World War II, even though the causality rate was rising, most Americans continued to think it was a “just war” right to the end. It was only during the Vietnam era and beyond, when spin and media manipulation was used to justify entering wars on false pretences that the public become wary and public confidence waned. In other words, the issue is not with a necessary war per se, but with the deliberate use of war for a dishonest end and the packaging of that war through government and media deception.

This is a superbly presented doco with a wide range of primary source materials ranging from early information of the Gulf of Tonkin incident (where the US government deliberately falsified an incident to enter the war) right through to Iraq.

It uses snapshots of reports from Fox, MSNBC and CNN to show just how compromised their reporting really is and especially takes aim at the ludicrous concept of embedding journalists with the military, where emotional bonding and peer pressure assure the sort of reporting the government needs.

This is an informed, intelligent and well presented documentary, which is based on clear and critical thinking about the media and hence has a lot to offer.

I believe that its message is also more general than simply “war journalism” as it reflects on all aspects of reporting and journalism and on the need for a new analytical approach to current affairs and indeed, in everyday life.





# MAGAZINES IN REVIEW



## Asian Cult Cinema Issue #59



As always, superbly presented and packed with photos throughout. It also includes some superb Asian cinema journalism especially a very whacked out review of Girls Rebel Force of Competitive Swimmers written by the legendary horror author Edward Lee. He dares to call this Swim Team vs. Sex Zombies flick: "The Most Honest Movie Ever Made." There are lots of capsule reviews, an interview with Lee Chang Dong, Ric and Infamous covering Mad Detective and Three Kingdoms (and a few others). Sick Nurses commentary on the movie by Graham Lewis. Jerry White writes "Singing in the Pain," an unforgettable critique of Karaoke Terror and elusive Japanese director Sion Sono director of Exte and Suicide Circle. is interviewed by Patrick Van Hauwaert.

There is also a comprehensive Asian Cult cinema report.

**Web:** <http://www.asiancult.com/>

## Ditkomania Issue 67 Quarterly Zine Rob Imes 13510 Cambridge #307 Southgate, MI 48195 USA



Issue 67 of Ditkomania is another little gem opening the door into the world of Steve Ditko's unique comic style and worldview. It is nicely illustrated with some great images of Shade. Shade was one of Ditko's ultimate "outsider" figures and this issue includes two excellent articles on Shade and rare reprints of art and images.

Other articles include a review of Strange and Stranger, the new Steve Ditko biography.

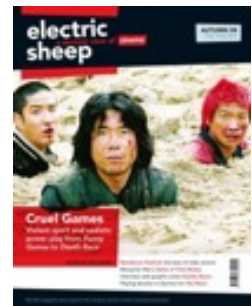
There is also a discussion of Ditko's first drawing of the Skrull which was until recently believed to be first

drawn by Jack Kirby in 1962. There is also a fascinating discussion of Objectivism and fantasy. This is an especially interesting piece.

The quality of the comics on the front covers and inside are very impressive and is another superb issue.

**Email:** [robimes@yahoo.com](mailto:robimes@yahoo.com)

## Electric Sheep A deviant view of Cinema Autumn 08 Issue Sold by Wallflower Press



Electric sheep always impresses with a solid balance of in depth examinations of themes and trends within cinema and good coverage of festivals, reviews and unusual new releases.

The Autumn 08 issue focuses on "Cruel Games" – Violent sport and sadistic power plays and gives quite in depth analysis of films ranging from Death Race, Battle Royale, Cube and Rollerball through to Funny Games and 13 (Tzmati). The analysis is informed, intelligent and thought provoking. There are also some interesting interviews along the way – the interview with Dennis Gansel on "The Wave" was intriguing. The Wave was based on a written account of a school experiment when a teacher devised a class scenario to explore the development of fascist tendencies, the problem is that it worked too well and spawned a right wing school movement !

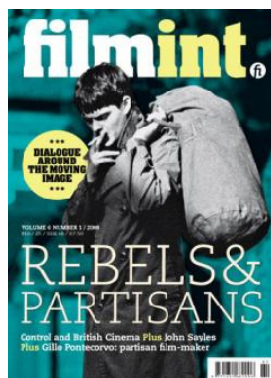
There is also an interview with Rod Dickinson on his restaging of the Obedience game and its relevance to issues regarding power and violence.

Also included in this issue is Cinerama looking at various film festivals, Videodrome examining new releases of offbeat cinema ranging from Black White + Gray to Vampyr and some other interviews and columns.

**Web:** <http://wallflowerpress.co.uk>.  
**Also see Electric Sheep Website:**  
<http://www.electricsheepmagazine.com>

## Film International

Filmint is a high quality film journal which has been promoting intellectual film culture since 1973. Every issue offers in-depth cinema analysis combined with film happenings, DVD, book, film and festival news and reviews.



Filmint is published six times per year and is full colour, each issue is around 100 pages.

Articles range from examinations of themes and motifs within cinema to focus articles on specific film-makers and critical articles on specific films. This is not a "lightweight" cinema magazine, but a high quality film studies journal offering well researched insightful articles which are well referenced and erudite. Each article includes keywords, contributor details and references.

At the same time it is approachable and entertaining as well as informative, Filmint strikes a good balance between film criticism and studies and general intellectual film commentary and communicates well for anyone interested in film, whether a film studies student or just someone who just wants to be better informed.

The extremely high quality of cinematic journalism in Filmint can be suggested by just some of the articles which grabbed my attention in the last few issues.

Volume 6 No. 1 includes a comprehensive study of Control and British Cinema focusing on the film Control about New Order and Ian Curtis. There is also a focus study on Gillo Pontecorvo, an overview of Austrian cinema and a study of Ben Bolt's adaptation of Henry James The Turn of the Screw.

Volume 6 No. 2 includes a fascinating study of Brazilian Science Fiction cinema, a comprehensive feature examining the career of Steven Spielberg, a psychoanalytic reading of Curse of the Golden Flower, a study of New Zealand Genre film and a reading on Dr. Who among other pieces.

Volume 6 No 3 includes a look at the unusual and bizarre Cremaster 3, a great piece on the Sartana/Sabata Cycle in Spaghetti Westerns and some interesting interviews with Vincent Moon and George Toles in conversation with Jeffrey Crouse.



Volume 6 no 4 will be of special interest to readers of Synergy as it focuses on Genre cinema. It is packed with all sorts of articles on every possible aspect of Genre cinema with specific reference to film festivals worldwide.

Each issue is beautifully published with colour and black and white images and always surprises with the diverse range of content and informative commentary.

The website also offers some great content include sample articles and reviews and is certainly worth regularly visiting.

Web: <http://www.filmint.nu/>

## Korean Film Observatory

### Print and Online Editions

Korean Film Observatory is a quarterly magazine published by the Korean Cinema board covering the Korean film industry, film festivals, media and focus articles on film companies, directors, distributors etc.



It is an excellent way to keep track of some of the great films that are coming out of Korea. It is a well produced glossy magazine of around fifty pages and issues are also available as pdf downloads online.

The website is also packed with free information even including an annual summary of Korean cinema covering all major films of the year available as a free download, there are also issue papers and director's focus.

This is a prime example of a national film industry taking pro active steps to bring its films to a wider audience, it is one of the most comprehensive national film websites on the web and considering some of the super films coming out of Korean it is well worth checking on a regular basis taking pro active steps to bring its films to a wider audience, it is one of the most comprehensive national film websites on the web and considering some of the super films coming out of Korean it is well worth checking on a regular basis.

Issue 27 includes lots of interesting content including reviews of all the major Korean releases for the first half of 2008 and a summary of Korean films on the festival circuits. There are also focus articles on JUNG woo-sung and BONG Joon-Ho.

Web: <http://www.koreanfilm.or.kr>



## Morpheus Tales Issue #1

This is the first issue of Morpheus Tales and boy, it certainly goes off with a bang. It is nicely produced, packed with a range of genre fiction and illustrated with superb dark art.



What I am especially impressed with is the range of fiction, Morpheus Tales seems to aim to cross boundaries and hence includes not only horror, fantasy and science fiction but strange and unusual stories which are hard to classify. All the tales are top notch, indeed I cannot think of one I did not like !

Also included is some non fiction, in this issue this was an extensive interview with Joseph D'Lacey the author of Meat and various reviews.

The aim is to produce this magazine quarterly and I sure hope they get to do so. I believe it could become of major significance within the independent genre fiction field !

**Web:** <http://www.morpheustales.com>

## Murky Depths Quarterly Anthology of Graphically Dark Speculative Fiction

**Web:** <http://www.murkydepths.com/>

Murky Depths bills itself as a quarterly anthology of graphically dark speculative fiction and it certainly lives up to its spiel. Beautifully presented, graphically arresting and filled to the brim with all manner of speculative fiction presented in various forms, ranging from text to a diversity of graphic styles. There are also occasional interviews and related items throughout the five issues I have in front of me.

The first thing that grabs you about Murky Depths is the "look", it has covers to die for, very high quality print production and a great range of different graphic styles. From simple line cartoons to extremely detailed work, from text to strange amalgams that exist somewhere in-between !

Each issue seems to improve in quality, which is no mean feat for such a high quality product to begin with. It is around 90 pages, has colour covers which are always eye catching and only includes a small amount of advertising. The diversity in genres and graphic style is exceptional.

To give you just some idea about the content, I will discuss just some of the stories in issues four and five which grabbed my attention..

"Warped" by James Johnson with artwork by Leonardo M. Giron is a tale presented in a superb tradi-

tional comic tale style. It is a great combination of Sci Fi and horror. When a rescue ship comes for General Kia they find his warship full of monsters with the General trapped in the only safe spot, waiting for his rescuers to arrive and so the action begins..

"Day Boy" by Trent Jamieson with artwork by Brian Troll is a rather unique take on a vampire tale, it offers a very intriguing read. The Day Boy is the servant of a vampire. He likes his work but has had to pay a high cost including the death of his family. Unexpectedly, his master has died and he knows the other vampires and their servants will come for him. However, rather than escaping he decides to take revenge on the other masters and their servants.

"Final Cut" written by James Johnson with artwork by Leonardo M. Giron is a tale of addiction. When Hollywood child stars lose it, they certainly do so with style. This is an impressive tales offering a balance of a Slasher story with a sarcastic look at celebrity addiction.

"Killer of the Dead" by Edward M. Erdelac with artwork by Tom Moran is a rather unusual historical tale which features a battle between Wild West vampires and Native American victims.

"Fix" by Matt Doyle with artwork by Ed Norden is a rather neat tale. It explores the issue of drug use from a totally different angle with a bite in the tail. We journey to a future world where drugs have evolved to a level that a new substance can give users the ability to magically shot fireballs and lightning bolts ! There is lots of think about here including issues about government control and the obsessive desire for power.



I have only chosen a few tales, of course each issue includes a lot more, most issues include between 10 -14 including some poetry and interviews.

Murky Depths also offers some free pdf samplers on the site, so it is really worth downloading them and experiencing what I am talking about. I feel sure you will subscribe after encountering Murky Depths first hand !!!

**Scarlet: The Film Magazine**  
PO Box 2092  
Cleona, PA 17042  
USA



Scarlet Street was a fascinating cinema journal magazine published for some years by Richard Valley. It was a magazine to be treasured because it scratched below the surface of the world of cinema and explored the world of the sub-text. It was intelligent and erudite as well as witty and entertaining. After Richard's passing, Scarlet the Film Magazine was born with Ken Shinnick as Publisher and Harry H Long of Van Helsing's Journal fame as Managing Director. Issue 1 No 1 is a nicely produced magazine of a good eighty pages, it has colour covers and good quality printing.

It offers a range of what will, I presume, be regular sections covering news and reviews. The reviews section is extensive covering DVD and books. The books section is also interposed with an interesting interview with Gary Rhodes on Bela Lugosi. There is a superb section on music soundtracks offering all sorts of information about rare film themes many of us have never heard of, until now.

The articles are comprehensive and as would be expected open with a nice piece offering memories of Richard Valley. There are then some great, well researched articles on not only horror and classic film but on related genres such as literature. The piece on Edgar Allan Poe by Harry Long is extensive. There is also a very insightful study dissecting the themes and motifs of *The Black Cat* by Edgar G Ulmar, a film that is not as appreciated as it should be for exploring taboo themes at a very stage in cinema history. This is followed by a fascinating study of how *The Black Cat* was marketed and "sold" to the public.

There is also a further good article on a small independent company Levy-Gardner-Laven which produced twelve films through to 1982 including such wonders as *The Monster* that challenged the world and *The Vampire*. Scarlet ends with a discussion of the prosthetics and make up used in *Young Frankenstein* the musical and the legal quagmire related to the look of *Frankenstein* and how to get around it.

This is a superb first issue for the new "incarnation" of Scarlet, it is packed with informative content, well researched articles nicely illustrated with rare images and lots of insightful reviews and news. I believe it has a very good future in front of it.

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## **Serial Killer Magazine Issue 2**

Serial Killer Magazine is a dark and horrid thrill. Most of us don't want to admit how much we are fascinated by Serial Killers and yet we watch every crime show on TV, dwell on the news and just love those special docos, especially the ones that offer every possible grizzly detail. We pretend to look away or cover our eyes, but if we were honest, we would admit we always take a peak !



Serial Killer Magazine does away with all the pretence and gives the reader what they want, a magazine dedicated to the study of Serial Killers as the perfect criminal enigma. No excuses, no justifications – Serial Killers and lots of them.

As soon as you receive the magazine you are stunned by just how damn good it looks. This magazine is a work of "dark art" in itself – packed with incredible illustrations, rare source documents, wanted posters, comics and more - it is startling, confronting and down right intense.

When you get to the articles they are superbly well researched and presented, they range from excellent solid studies on the history of Serial Killers and Cannibals to the more general such as the Top Ten most Vile Killers. There are lots of specialist focus articles on killers such as BTK, Bundy and Gacy. What sets these apart is the use of primary source materials, there are lots of scans of original documents, letters and news articles - indeed there is even a page of Serial Killer signatures !

The diversity of content in this issue is impressive, from serious studies to irreverent humour, from rare interviews to the bizarre famous last words of killers as they went to the chair. I especially like the last words of George Appel, who in 1928, as he went to the electric chair, offered the witty retort of "well gentlemen, you are about to see a baked appel".

Issue One is already sold out and considering the demand for Issue two it won't be around forever either. This is a quirky, bizarre and unusual magazine filled to the brim with madness, death, art and history. Get a copy soon before you miss out !

While you are their check out some of there other stuff, they have an awesome site packed with everything you would want to know about Serial Killers (and a lot you may not !) and some great products ranging from Calendars to collector cards !

**Web:** <http://serialkillercalendar.com>



### **Torpedo Volume 3 Falcon Vs Monkey**

Torpedo Volume three is once again a superb release from Falcon Vs Monkey, the quality and quantity of the fiction offered cannot be faulted.

Issue three was designed by Eirian Chapman and features fiction from Ben Jahn, Kris Allison, Eric Han-son, Obelia Modjeska, Neil Boyack, Peter Orner, Garth Risk Hallberg, Natalie Johnson, Paul Mitchell, Karl Smith, Mark Halloran, Keya Mitra and Ryan Crawford.

Like normal there are some very strange stories on show ranging from a tale about Tupperware to stories about killer robots and vampire owls..

A unique touch is that Volume three also includes a 50 page special graphic fiction section featuring the talents of Walter Newton, Dylan Horrocks, Paul O'Connell, Tim Molloy & Stephanie von Reisz.

The range of graphic styles is impressive from a semi photographic collage presentation in Happy Daze to the murky and dark look of In the Shadow of the Pineapple. Throughout Torpedo 3 are some superb illustrations and it is wrapped in a very cool art deco cover from Jordan Clarke.

**Web:** <http://www.falconvsmonkey.com>

**Van Helsing's Journal  
World Fantastica  
PO Box 2092  
Cleona, PA. 17042  
USA**

Van Helsing's Journal is published three times a year and each issue is around 60 pages. It has a simple black and white presentation with covers of the same colour.

It evolved from the old Peter Cushing Confidential Fanzine and is dedicated to what could be best defined as "fantastic cinema" covering many genres from horror to science fiction and the unusual. It is unusual in that it also gives solid coverage to silent and rare films with extensive articles and impeccable research.

The first thing that stands out when examining an



issue of Van Helsing's Journal (I have issues 8 and 9 in front of me) is the focus on "old world" cinema. There are so many magazines which primarily focus on new releases and if they do not have a some "blockbusters" in their first few pages think they have failed. Van Helsing's Journal focuses on rare and unusual films with extensive well researched articles which offer the very best in cinema journalism.

Sure, there are a good, solid range of CD reviews, covering the soundtracks of the world of cinema, DVD reviews and related content, but the focus is on solid research and this makes Van Helsing's Journal a unique publication.

Volume 8 includes some splendid articles. Just some of the pieces that come to mind are the well researched article on Somerset Maugham and the Magicians with some fascinating insight into the connections between Maugham and Aliester Crowley.

A marvelous interview with Lupita Tovar, the start of Spanish language Hollywood horrors, an extensive examination of the classic film The Night of (or Curse of) the Demon and a good look at the rare early film the Slaughter of Maria Marten. These articles are all illustrated with nice black and white photos, images, posters and memorabilia many you would not find anywhere else.

Volume 9 continues the trend in offering superb journalism and very comprehensive full length articles. There are again a nice selection of CD and DVD reviews and some book reviews as well with a special in-depth review of the amazing Mario Bava Box sets.

However, the emphasis is on cinema journalism, again to a very high standard. The article on Bela Lugosi in London is part of what looks to be an on-going series on Lugosi, it is insightful and includes lots of interesting information and some great images. There is a fascinating piece on La Spectre Vert, a very early French language film from MGM and a great article on the Blind Death imagery of Amanda de Ossorio, who produced an amazing series of Knight Templar zombie films. I love the fun examination of those wild space woman who populate the world of early science fiction.

Van Helsing's journal is packed with rare and exciting cinema journalism giving coverage to classic, rare and unusual films which are, to be honest, usually forgotten and ignored.

I think that Van Helsing's Journal is doing an admirable job keeping these wonders in the public eye and highly recommend it to anyone seeking cinema which is more than "skin deep".

**Email:** [harryhlong@yahoo.com](mailto:harryhlong@yahoo.com)





**Withersin Magazine**  
**3 Issues per year**  
**Perfect Bound—Digest**

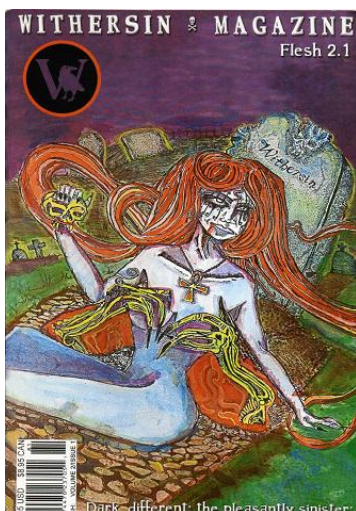
Withersin Magazine is an unusual magazine which focuses on the “dark, different and pleasantly sinister”. It is published three times a year, about 100 pages an issue, black and white interiors with colour covers. It is perfect bound and digest sized.

Each issue has a theme, for example, Issue 1.3 was Death, 2.1 Flesh and 2.2 Bone. It is a rather eccentric publication which is hard to quite put your finger on, it does not fit within traditional genres or literary categories, it crosses between fiction, strange and interesting non fictional articles, art, reviews and news and even some humour. It is very nicely presented and looks just as good as it reads !

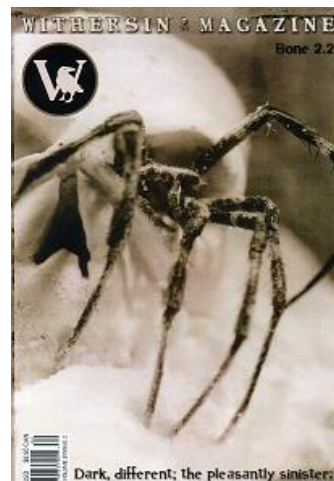
Issue 2.1 is the current issue and is called Flesh, it opens with a definition of the term Flesh including the fact that the word Eskimo comes from Eskimaux, which means eater of Raw Flesh. It then offers a superb range of unusual and entertaining content. Bobbie Metevier on Zombies, an article on Corneal Blindness, Kelly

Jameson great story “Urges Contrary To Swallowing”, recipes, Charles Coylott “teethGRINDER”, an interview with Michael Lohr on horror writing and related subjects, the Root of Horror by Larry Roberts and lots more.

It is packed with fascinating and strange content and some quite astounding artwork which ranges from photos and line art to superb full page illustrations for the fictional stories.



Issue 2.2 which has a release date of October is called Bone and it opens with, you guessed it, information on the nature and function of Bone. There are all sorts of intriguing articles including non-fiction pieces on Chem Trails, Diseases and death and strange Bones. Interviews with Chainsaw Sally and a real vampire and a cool Sweeney Tod historical piece.



There is some great fiction, illustrated with full page artwork, there is even an article on pickles and one on the Patron Saint of Bones. This is another truly marvellous and eccentric issue from Withersin.

If I go back to an earlier issue such as Issue 1.3 on death it includes some fascinating non-fiction pieces on Haunted Houses in the U.K, Strange and Scary Stops in New York, Unusual Deaths, Anthropomancy, interviews D. Harlan Wilson, Sharon Del Adel and with Edward Lee on splatterpunk. There is some great fiction and again some stunning artwork.



I absolutely adore this magazine; it is so fresh, so different and unusual. Every time you turn a page you do not know what to expect – while there may be a general theme Withersin explores it in an unusual and creative way so you get all manner of fiction, folklore, anecdotes, historical tales, interviews and art.

Every issue seems better than the last and to include more and more unusual, challenging and thought provoking articles – Withersin is both darkly informative and entertaining.

This is a prime example of the joy of independent publishing – innovative, creative and downright strange.

**Web:** <http://www.withersin.com>



# HANGING SHADOWS!

## Cinecocktail 4: The Italian Horror Show

### Hanging Shadows

Web: <http://www.beatrecords.it>

When I think of my first experience of Italian horror it was seeing *Suspiria* in an old downtown cinema on a rainy night. There was something truly momentous about that first experience which went way beyond the plot and storytelling. My emotions were shocked to their foundations and I was hooked! There was a bizarre use of colour and form, unusual camera angles and the strangest of concepts, but primarily what stood out was a truly innovative use of textured sound. This approach to the use of music and sound in Horror film is in many ways uniquely Italian. Whether we are discussing the works of Dario Argento, the Cannibal classics of Deodato or the Zombie films of Fulci, they all made use of music in a way which was very different from that in Hollywood horror films. It could be said that while mainstream US soundtracks used music to tell a story, the Italian horror film allowed music to be the story. While horror developed in Hollywood using convoluted plots and stories, Italian horror seemed to explore unconscious territory, with non lineal storytelling, textured mood and layered environmental sound.

Soundtracks of such music are always hard to come by and when you find a collectors gem such as Cinecocktail 4: The Italian Horror Show you know you have hit it big time. The first thing you notice about this release is its superior presentation. It looks great and has an eye-catching horror cover, it has a full colour insert which slips into the front and is in Italian and English. This is clearly a product made for the world market and includes English translations of all text and information.



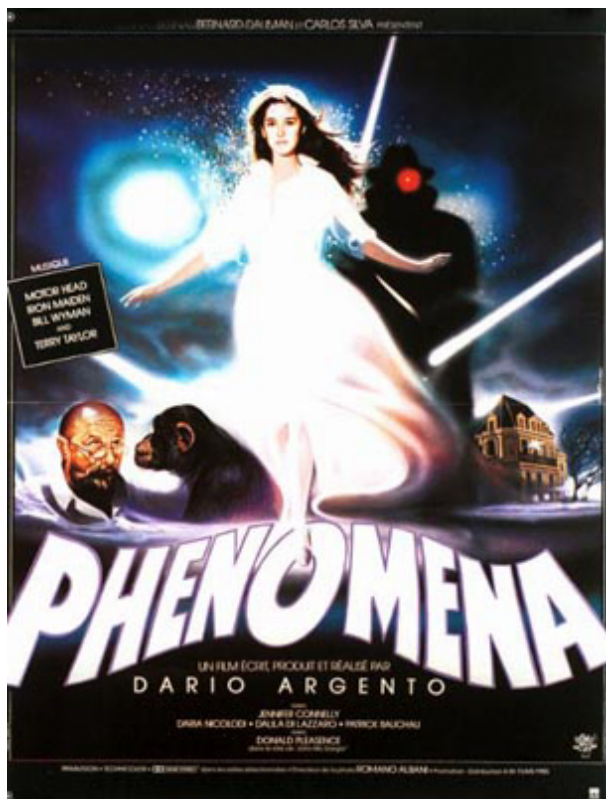
With some many “re issued soundtracks” of various degrees of quality, this is a true surprise, not only is the quality of the recording impeccable but there are lots of never before released tracks. This is quite exciting, not only rare and unusual Italian horror music but never released tracks from all manner of films from *Zombie Holocaust* through *House 3* to *April Night*.

The music has a groovy, cocktail sound, lounge music for the dark soul. Smooth, yet edgy, dreamy yet with a slice of night. There are pieces which are reflective and silky, others which have a more traditional horror texture, there is lounge, piano, electronic and orchestral.

If this was all there was, there it would still be great for both soundtrack lovers and horror aficionados, but it also comes with a DVD documentary on Italian horror by Paolo Fazzini called “Hanging Shadows”.



Dario Argento



Hanging Shadows is a high quality documentary of approximately one hour, it is nicely edited with rare footage and packed with interviews. It is in Italian with clear and easy to follow English subtitles which are well translated. It offers an excellent overview of Italian horror, fantasy and fantastic cinema through focused interviews with a range of major directors and those connected to their work such as special effects co-ordinators, sound technicians etc.

Along the way we also come to appreciate the unique characteristics of the various directors, such as Argento, Bava and Fulci and what makes them tick. For example, there is a fascinating discussion of the research Argento undertakes before a film.

When developing Phenomena (Creepers), he came across a news item discussing how insects could be used in solving crime and this then formed one of the major aspects of the film. Further, he even based the illness of the "monster child" on a real condition (Patau Syndrome) and used medically accurate information.

Argento also has very specific rules for his filmmaking which make his style unique. He has consciously decided to locate brutal murders in wealthy neighbourhoods, for example, because he believes that in such an environment the impact of the imagery of the killing is more intense.

One of the other interesting discussions is the issue of class within Italian cinema. It seems that due to the great success of major directors in Italy that these Maestros are seen as representatives of high

art and fantasy and horror is seen as somewhat low brow. Indeed, at times, high art directors are called artists while others are simply classified as Artisans. It is argued that this elitist approach is based in a misjudgement of the artistic merit of the medium and has in many

ways stifled modern fantasy and horror film production (except in independent productions). It is also a strange occurrence, since worldwide Italian horror is celebrated as the epitome of style and art.



Hanging Shadows covers so much territory including discussions of censorship, social issues and the nature of violence of cinema. Ruggero Deodato offers some fascinating insights into the problems he experienced with his Cannibal films due to the fact that they focus on potentially real events rather than supernatural horrors. He also discusses how he encoded social themes, such as a criticism of journalistic extremism, into Cannibal Holocaust.

We also receive a solid discussion of the development of independent cinema with a special reference to the work of Roger Fratter. Hanging Shadows is an excellent documentary, well presented, superbly edited with some excellent clips and footage and very insightful interviews.

It is astonishing that it comes as part of a package ! Together these two products form a literal collectors goldmine !

A high quality collectors Italian Horror CD with many never before recorded tracks and a DVD offering one of the very best documentaries on Italian Horror on the market.

*All I can say is what a find !!!*

Sure, you may have to make a bit of an effort to get it, but it is well worth it.

Visit Beat Records website today !

**Web:** <http://www.beatrecords.it>





### In search of the Great Beast 666 Classic Home Entertainment

Aleister Crowley has always been an enigma, dubbed the wickedest man in the world, he is loved and loathed in equal amounts.

There are organizations such as the OTO who revere him as the prophet and bringer of secret knowledge for a new age—the new aeon of Horus. There others who still, years later, who still denounce him as a Satanist and worse.

His life was one of extremes filled with flashes of genius, madness, cavalier disregard for himself and others, fleeting successes and horrific disasters. He is remembered as a poet, author, mountaineer, psychonaut, counter cultural rebel and more.

Depending on the biography you read he was a bit like lord Byron “mad, bad and dangerous to know”, at the same time I think this overlooks the complexity of his life and experience.

It could be said that Crowley was the bastard child of the Plymouth Brethren, a dangerously strict Christian sect, indoctrinated by severe fundamentalist religious dogma as a child he spent a lifetime trying to escape his binds and many of those attracted to him were likewise pained.

Crowley himself while steeped in religious imagery and symbols, saw himself as a “scientific illuminist”, he viewed religion and spirituality sceptically and used what he called “Magick” as a way to explore unknown psychological realms.



I tend to see him as one of the most radical of psychonauts, who risked his sanity in an attempt to gain it, but of course, that came at a high cost.

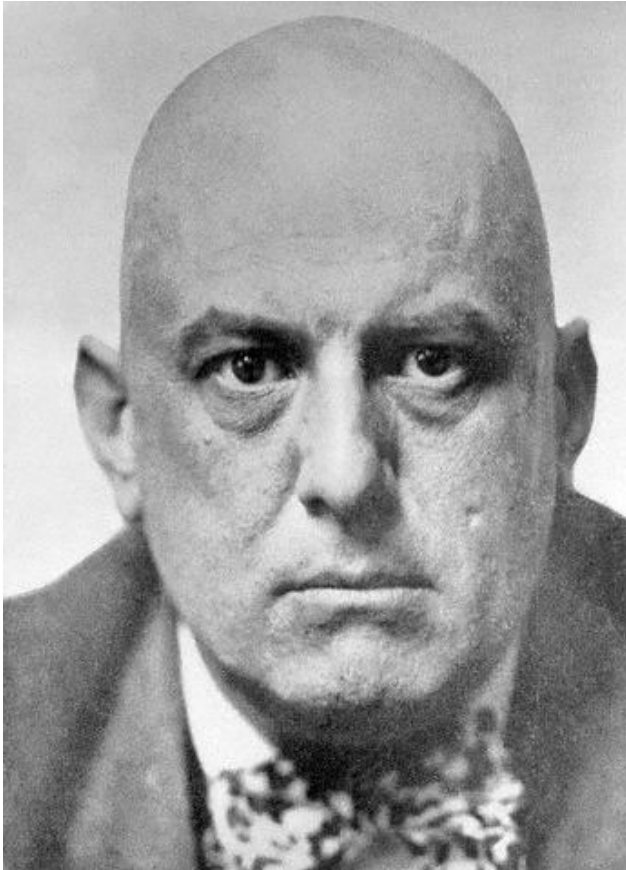
There has been a large number of biographies written about Crowley, ranging from his own work (“The Confessions of Aleister Crowley”) which he called a “autohagiography” and which is the best work of self promotion you will ever find to various serious academic works and a vast number of cheap “yellow” paperback tomes. John Symonds “The Great Beast” was one of the best selling biographies of Crowley for many years.

Surprisingly, this is the first serious film made documenting his life. It is an impressive production using an incredible range of primary sources and has obviously referenced a vast library of biographies and research to produce what is essentially a two hour study of Crowley’s life and work.

This is no mean feat, there are not too many full length two hour documentaries and even less on controversial and unusual subjects such as this one.

This is no mean feat, there are not too many full length two hour documentaries and even less on controversial and unusual subjects such as this one.

It is beautifully edited and directed using actors to play Crowley and the other characters throughout the program. This adds an extra dimension to a film which could easily have ended up as a long slide-show. Instead through the use of images, photos, film, art images, re-enactments and interviews with actors playing major roles it becomes an extremely engaging viewing experience.



The voice over by Joss Ackland is excellent as is the music by Rick Wakeman. I also like the fact that while this is not a "sensationalist" take on Crowley's life, it is "warts and all".

It honestly, discusses his sexually peccadilloes, he uses of drugs, his excessive indulgences and the cost in terms of human suffering of his experimentation at the edges of consciousness.

However, it works to keep to the facts and while it does reference rumours and innuendo, makes it clear what is supposed fact and what is unsubstantiated rumour.

There are some great titbits including the possible relationship between the Great Beast and George Bush and the various rumours about Crowley and Ian Fleming, war time espionage and underground activity, but these are clearly thrown out for debate and left for the viewer to make up their own mind.

The background knowledge of Thelema, occultism, ritual magic and the fringes of consciousness exploration shows in this documentary. It is difficult to make a program on a character such as Crowley unless one has a solid undertaken of the worldview in which Crowley worked and the organizations in which he was active. I was impressed with the background provided on the OTO, A.A, the Golden Dawn (including an initiation re-enactment) and various related occult and Freemasonry organization.



It was also good to see that the director had a good appreciation of the way in which Crowley saw himself, especially in terms of the way in which he used wit and humour.

Crowley was a trickster and there is no doubt that a lot of what he did and said was part of an deliberate assault on the conservative values of the prevailing society, accordingly, it is nice to see that In Search of the Great Beast 666 has a great sense of play.

So often in a book on Crowley something is pulled out of context and hence loses its meaning, a comment made in wit and with sarcasm can, so often, mean something else if repeated incorrectly.

In this film, the actor playing Crowley has his tongue firmly placed in his cheek and you can enjoy the sense of fun Crowley obviously had with so many things he said or did.

There are some very funny scenes, especially Crowley's comments in his court case and some of his witticisms about life, sexuality and the world around him.

This is quite an achievement for a film on such a controversial figure, it is not only informative, balanced and well researched, showing an intricate knowledge of a admittedly fringe area, but has a wicked sense of humour and wit as well.

This is a great entertainment, informative and hugely enjoyable !

**Web:** <http://www.classicvdshop.com>

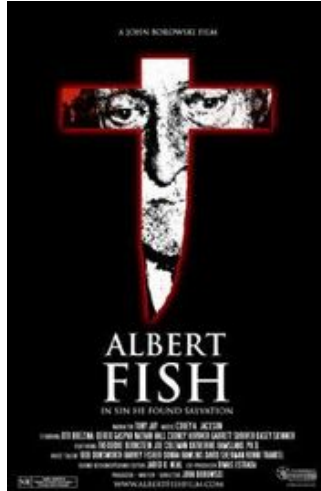


# ALBERT FISH

## IN SIN HE FOUND SALVATION

**John Borowski**  
**R1 DVD**

Albert Fish was considered one of the most reviled killers of the early 20th century. Child Killer, cannibal and violent sado-masochist, Fish appeared to all who saw him to be a rather polite elderly gentleman and hence proved very difficult to catch.



Fish had a pathology which made him especially dangerous, he was able to hold down various jobs and fulfil a relatively normal social role while living a double life as a serial killer and cannibal.

Fish was a loving father and never showed any violence or even raised his voice to her children and yet in his other life was a savage killer, his hatred of others was other matched with the masochistic violence and hatred he showed towards himself.

Throughout the 1920's until he died in the eclectic chair in 1936, he lived a life obsessed with religion and dominated by pain, suffering, cannibalism, torture and murder. In the end he was charged with first degree murder and sent to the electric chair. Fish stated that he looked forward to his electrocution as a experience in pain he had not had before.

It has been conservatively estimated that he killed between 5 and 15 children and teens and attacked hundreds of others throughout most states in America. How many he actually killed we will never know. He primarily attacked young and poor teens and children as they were the easiest victims.

During this period the biggest fear was kidnapping for ransom and no one suspected a killer such as Fish could exist, sadly, it may also be noted that the children of the poor were not necessarily a high priority to the police.

At the same time it should be said that that there was no FBI during this period and inter police department communication was not existent. Investigation skills were rudimentary and Fish was a skilled, manipulative and dangerously intelligent killer.



Fish mixed strange religious obsessions with his mental disturbance and this is what makes Borowski's documentary so interesting. He doesn't just outline the history of the Fish case but explores its origins and the way in which it combined with his religious extremism to create a truly demented individual. Fish took Christianity literally and hence became obsessed with its themes of suffering, the evils of sex, death, sin and redemption.

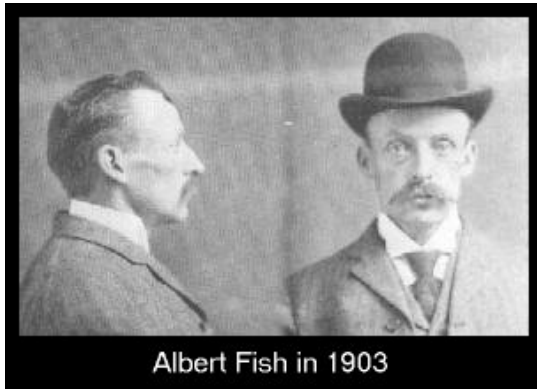
Stories such as the Old Testament tale of Abraham's sacrifice of his son (stopped just in time by an angel) and the death of Christ became part of his sado-masochistic worldview. Images such as St. Sebastian pieced by arrows and the communion rites where the wine and bread literally become Christ's blood were similarity interpreted. Indeed, the communion rite became his justification for indulgence in cannibalism.

This is a superbly produced documentary with a great voice over by Tony Jay using a wide range of source material, stills and powerful re-enactments. The re-enactments are very processional and confronting and at times brutal.

The intersection between his obsessions and religious mania make this film very thought provoking. There are also excellent interviews with forensic psychologist Katherine Ramsland and with outsider artist Joe Coleman.

The use of excerpts from Fish's letters are chilling and horrifying. Joe Coleman has in his possession the original letter Albert Fish wrote to Grace Budd's parents, six years after she went missing.

It is hard to get a handle on just how one would feel receiving such a letter..



Albert Fish in 1903

"...On Sunday June the 3, 1928 I called on you at 406 W 15 St. Brought you pot cheese, strawberries. We had lunch. Grace sat in my lap and kissed me. I made up my mind to eat her. On the pretense of taking her to a party. You said yes she could go. I took her to an empty house in Westchester I had already picked out. When we got there, I told her to remain outside. She picked wildflowers. I went upstairs and stripped all my clothes off.

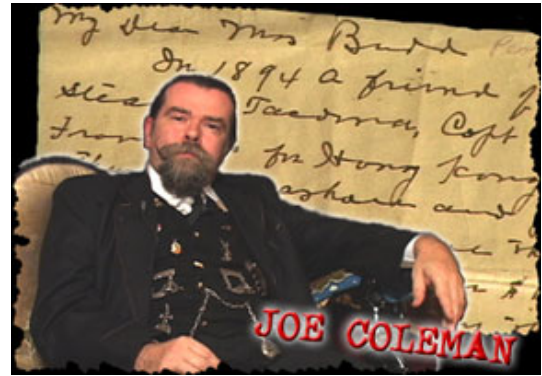
I knew if I did not I would get her blood on them. When all was ready I went to the window and called her. Then I hid in a closet until she was in the room. When she saw me all naked she began to cry and tried to run down the stairs. I grabbed her and she said she would tell her mamma. First I stripped her naked. How she did kick, bite and scratch. I choked her to death, then cut her in small pieces so I could take my meat to my rooms. Cook and eat it. How sweet and tender her little ass was roasted in the oven. It took me 9 days to eat her entire body. I did not fuck her tho I could of had I wished. She died a virgin.

The film works at a leisurely pace also proving solid background on the period in which Fish lived, worked and killed with discussions of the nature of family life and the police service of that period. I found this especially significant as it provided a context for the life of Albert Fish.

Too often crime docos focus on the killer and victims alone and we do not get a feel for the period in which they live and possible causes. Certainly this does not detract from the horrific nature of their crimes but it does give a deeper understanding to their possible causes, especially in Fish's case, when we consider the violent abuse he had received in the orphanage in which he grew up.

At the same time Borowski makes no attempt to water down or cover up the brutality of his crimes, there is no whitewash or on the other hand any sensationalism, this is an honest portrayal of a vicious and demented serial killer and it is for that reason that this is a very superior documentary which stands out from many others made on similar subjects.

There are some controversial aspects of the documentary and these mainly focus on Joe Coleman. An eccentric outsider, Coleman offers some truly telling

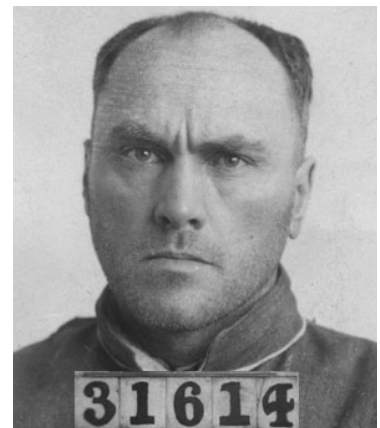


commentary on the significance of religious ideas within Fish's pathology and on Fish in general. I like the inclusion of Coleman as it adds an "edge" to story, giving a different perspective on Albert Fish.

The DVD is packed with interesting features include multiple interviews, outtakes, trailers, a rather comprehensive history of the electric chair (11 minutes) and a interactive look at Joe Coleman's Fish portrait where you can click each section for a larger view. There is also a full reading on Fish's letter on Grace Budd and Billy Gaffney and a stills documentary.

Borowski's next film, already in production, is on Carl Panzram- Carl Panzram was in and out of prisons all his life and was a hate-filled serial killer. Brutalized in and out of various U.S. state prisons during 20th century America, Panzram unleashed a rampage of revenge that resulted in over 20 murders and countless acts of violent sodomy. A single act of kindness, by prison guard Henry Lesser, sparked a friendship that eventually influenced Panzram to write his autobiography. In 1930, Panzram was hanged for killing a laundry foreman at Leavenworth prison.

"In my lifetime I have murdered 21 human beings, I have committed thousands of burglaries, robberies, larcenies, arsons and last but not least I have committed sodomy on more than 1,000 male human beings. For all of these things I am not the least bit sorry. I have no conscience so that does not worry me. I don't believe in man, God nor Devil. I hate the whole damned human race including myself."



**Albert Fish Website:**

**Web:** <http://www.albertfishfilm.com>

**Carl Panzram Website:**

**Web:** <http://www.panzram.com>



# MUSIC IN REVIEW



## Agnosia Formication

Formication are at the edge of exploration of dark ambient landscapes and Agnosia is another impressive offering. It offers a powerful evocation of mood and emotion and really needs to be experienced either through headphones or very late at night without distraction. There is so much in every track and each listening turns up something more..

'Formication' have expanded of their idea behind 'Redux' which provided fixed track names but in a random order. 'Agnosia' is in constant flux, so much so that there can be no definite assumptions about any of the track titles.

The album's introduction opens with some rather infernal electronic percussion with the added textured of sound of synthesizers adding a great atmosphere, add to this distant voices and strange pulsing and clicking sounds and you know you are in for another superb journey.

The second track has a wailing sound that resonates through layers of twisted percussion which certainly creates a paranoid and claustrophobic mood, which is then relieved through the floating and soft waves of the following track.

The fourth track, my favourite, is intense and powerful. It is unnerving with its strange noises and use of clicks and voices to create a disorientating and passionate piece. Completing this exploration at the edges of dark music is a moody track which seems to mix all the different themes Formication like to explore.

This is an EP of around 32 minutes but certainly is a fascinating and powerful album. It takes us on a journey through unconscious territories, hovering between dreams and nightmares and is certainly worth exploring.

**Web:** <http://www.darkwinter.com>  
**Web:** <http://www.theformicarium.com>



## Bunny Boy The Residents MVD 2008

*"Boxes full of Armageddon, boxes full of death"*

The Residents are a highly creative and eccentric band; it is always hard to pin them down in relation to musical style and genre, at times punk, other times rock and even techno - each album is always a new experience.

They are always pranksters and seem to explore various multimedia opportunities nearly as much as their music. While some of their recent albums have been at the experimental end of things, Bunny Boy is subversively mainstream. It is also incredibly infectious! It has tunes which stick in your mind for you ages and you hum them over and over again, even though they are filled with dark and morbid lyrics !

The story centers around a bizarre and surreal character, the bunny boy, whose search for his missing brother compels him to post videos on the internet as a "cry for help." (see <http://www.residents.com>)

As the story evolves, it opens up to interaction between the bunny boy and his audience, causing the narrative to twist and turn in odd and totally unpredictable ways. Spanning a gap between insanity and self realization, the unhinged, but affable bunny boy soon finds himself pursuing a goal no less vital than saving the world from Armageddon.

This album is filled with rollicking tracks, 19 in all, they are dark, morbid and surreal, yet fast paced and truly memorable.

This is an album you will play time and time again and is one of the best releases from The Residents in quite a long time, it will thrill old fans and creates lots of new ones !

**Web:** <http://www.mvdb2b.com>

**Internet video Series for Bunny Boy:**  
**Web:** <http://www.residents.com>



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## Cinecocktail Beat Records

Wanna know what happens when you let Italian soundtrack nuts Paolo Scotti and Daniele De Gemini loose in the Beat Records archives? You get Cinecocktail: The Ultimate Easy Listening Compilation



This is a superb collection of groovy and sexy Italian soundtracks from the 60s and 70s, there are twenty tracks in all, included two which have never been released.

From the groovy beats of Papaya Island to the sultry sound of Military Music, from the bouncy sounds of Bi Di Bi Da to the sexy sound of Voce D'amore. This is a very smooth, laid series of tracks with lots of luxurious textures, velvet voices and lounge sounds !

You even get a bonus CD with three club remixes to liven things up a bit !

Cinecocktail is presented in a lovely four-fold digi-pack with English, Italian and Japanese text telling you everything you could ever want to know about the tracks including some 27 images of the albums and composers !

**Web:** <http://www.beatrecords.it>

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## Dead Eyes Can See Crimson Ghost

Crimson Ghost began around 2001. Four musicians from Cologne came together to form a cover band paying tribute to "The Misfits".



As time progressed they evolved their own unique style and became a dark horror punk band, mixing traditional horror riffs with metal, heavy rock and superb vocals.

They achieved quite some measure of success with their first albums Leaving the Tomb and Carpe Mortem.

Their latest release Dead Eyes Can See is a real winner, combining a high speed take no prisoners sound combined with some absolutely superb ballads and melodies. This is not to mention the superior vocals and dark and haunting lyrics.

There are thirteen tracks on the album and they are all memorable.

Thinking through just some of them I am impressed with the power of the sound and the quality of the musicianship.

Invade, for example, is a war like call to arms with all the blood curdling sounds of a true anthem, while Bloodred is a more traditional hard rock metal vampire track with some nice vocals and a great melody.

Nightbreed is another superbly melodic track with a great sound, it stays around long after you hear it and features some great vocals and a catchy sound, while To Hunt You Down has a great punk sound and is very edgy and has a bite to it.

Armagetron is a more traditional heavy metal even perhaps thrash track, while Forsaken is a superb dirge like traditional rock ballad.

This is a great album offering a powerful exploration of horror, punk and rock. Crimson Ghost move effortlessly through different styles of music, crossing boundaries and creating new sounds along the way.

From melodic rock to metal, punk to ballads, they are all here. This is an accomplished album with a great sound, interesting lyrics, great vocals and a rip roaring sense of style !

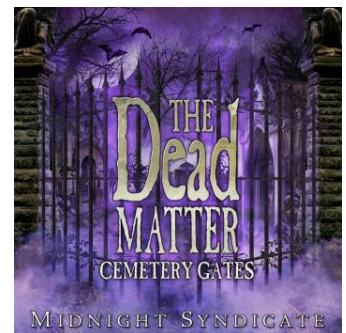
Always remember - Dead eyes can see....you.

**Web:** <http://www.crimson-ghosts.de>

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## (The) Dead Matter: Cemetery Gates Midnight Syndicate

Beyond the cemetery gates the dead do not rest easily. An ancient Egyptian relic, vampires, and the living dead lurk amongst its shadowy crypts.



Midnight Syndicate beckons you into the dark world that inspired a major motion picture...

The Dead Matter: Cemetery Gates is the ultimate horror movie soundtrack. It is symphonic, classic, dark and ambient, offering a layered sound which is creepy and edgy but not clichéd.

I have always enjoyed various Midnight Syndicate releases, but I consider this to be their very best, thus far anyway !



This is their first new original release since 13th Hour (reviewed last issue) and offers a further development of their style, the symphonic and classical texture is polished and refined and the atmosphere created is evocative indeed. At the same time it is not a "Hammer Horror" soundtrack and offers a very modern take on gothic entertainment, it avoids what one would expect and explores new and exciting directions.

The combination of a range of different forms from classical piano to choral renditions, injections of noise and occasional discordant elements, ethereal voices to rock motifs and occasional bursts of traditional horror fanfare make this an innovative and creative horror score.

It is a soundtrack which you will want to listen to again and again, it is great on a dark rainy night, when the wind is blowing and the wolves are howling.

Midnight Syndicate have a excellent website with lots of background information, sample tracks and a web-store. They are constantly working on their own music, scores for films and other projects so this is a high activity site and worth regularly checking back on.

Midnight Syndicate are also producing a film of the same name which will be released shortly. It will be fascinating to see how they combine their unique musical abilities with a flair for visual style. I am sure it will be a real winner.

**Web:** <http://www.midnightsyndicate.com>

### **A Devil on One Shoulder and An Angel on the Other**

**Greg Prato**

**Web:** <http://stores.lulu.com/gregprato>

*"I am honored that Greg has painstakingly accounted for what the hell happened during those crazy times. He has summed up all the chaos, jubilation, and paranoia that is Blind Melon."*

**Brad Smith**

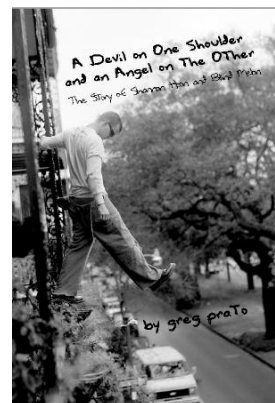
**Blind Melon bassist.**

One of the most tragic stories of the 1990's rock world was that of singer Shannon Hoon, and his band, Blind Melon. Despite scoring one of the decade's most enduring singles and videos, "No Rain," and a quadruple platinum hit with their 1992 self-titled debut album (in addition to touring alongside rock's biggest names), Hoon could not overcome a dangerous drug addiction.

Only two records into a promising career, Hoon was dead from an overdose at the age of 28. 'A Devil on One Shoulder and an Angel on the Other' is the first

book to tell the group's story – culled from over 50 exclusive interviews, and featuring many never-before-seen photos.

'A Devil on One Shoulder' was written by journalist Greg Prato, whose work as appeared in a variety of sites and magazines, including All Music Guide, Billboard.com, Rolling Stone.com, and Classic Rock Magazine, among others.



A long-time fan of the band, Greg has been working on this book - with the help of the surviving members of the band - for the past few years.

In the process, Greg conducted interviews with such renowned rock names as Duff McKagan (Velvet Revolver/Guns N' Roses), Gilby Clarke (G n' R), Mike Clink (G n' R producer), Kim Thayil (Soundgarden), Jerry Cantrell (Alice in Chains), Mike Inez (Alice in Chains), and Craig Ross (Lenny Kravitz), plus family and friends - including Shannon's mother, Nel Hoon.

While it will obviously appeal to fans of Shannon and Blind Melon, this 344 page paperback book (whose title comes from a phrase that guitarist Rogers Stevens once said to describe Shannon) will also be of interest to fans of Guns N' Roses, as Shannon's friendship with Axl Rose is chronicled throughout the years, as well as memories of when Melon opened shows for Guns 'n Roses in 1993 (at their out-of-control peak).

Elsewhere, you'll find additional stories on Soundgarden, Alice in Chains, Neil Young, Lenny Kravitz, Page & Plant, and the Rolling Stones – all of which are bands that Blind Melon toured with. And of course, new light is shed directly on this great yet often underrated band, as you get the inside scoop behind the three classic Hoon-era albums (the aforementioned 'Blind Melon,' 1995's 'Soup,' and 1996's posthumous release, 'Nico'), the story behind "No Rain," the colorful yet tragic life of Shannon, and the group's recent rebirth, with new singer Travis Warren (and new album, 2008's 'For My Friends').

The book is available through <http://www.lulu.com> for \$19.99 (U.S.), and there are samples to read at the site (including a full chapter, titled 'Axl and Shannon'). Blind Melon and Shannon Hoon's unforgettable story certainly deserves to be told, and 'A Devil on One Shoulder and an Angel on the Other' covers all the bases.

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## **Everything that Happens will Happen Today** **Brian Eno and David Byrne**

Brian Eno and David Byrne have just released a new album. It is their first collaborative effort in 30 years !!! It has quite a unique sound, it has a strong "Talking Heads" feel, as one would expect, but also seems more symphonic and orchestral. Eno did the music and Byrne worked with him on some of the tunes, but primarily wrote the songs and sang. He certainly hasn't lost his voice, this album has a great vocal style.



Everything that Happens will Happen Today has a subtle feel, sometimes folksy, sometimes poppy, a bit of electronica here and there, never quite what you expect. It is a laid back but has still includes the meaningful lyrics one would expect, including discussions of the Iraq war and current world conditions.

As part of the trend towards "direct distribution", the album is available exclusively from their Web site. You can sample and stream the songs for free but I feel free sure you will like them enough to buy a copy.

The download comes in various formats (mp3 and flac) and is very reasonably priced. There is also a limited edition deluxe package and physical CDs for those who want them.

This is an accomplished album, textured and layered with lots of great tunes, interesting explorations and it has, of course, that signature sound you expect from Eno and Byrne.

**Web:** <http://everythingthathappens.com/>

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## **Five Sound Installations** **Michael J Schumacher** **DVD Rom** **Xi Records**

Five Sound Installations is a superb work of experimental music, indeed it represents a new ways of exploring music and sound since it is not "pre-recorded" but is actually generated live by your computer (Windows or Mac).



It contains five quite unique sound compositions generated in real time by a computer algorithm. The works are: Room Piece Twenty-four, Noema, Steiner Suite, Unintending and Scene.

This is a unique way to explore the musical work of

Schumacher, each time you play a track, it is a different it is uniquely generated. It takes a while for the program to be loaded on your computer but then you can experience the live music of each track produced in real time.

The tracks all have different "programming" and generate very different experiences, 'Room Piece Twenty-four' for example, has a light gliding sort which sort of floats around the room, while the Steiner Suite is more rhythmic with quite seductive pipe music. The pieces continue to play until you turn off your computer and hence over a long period change and transform and offer different experiences of each track. What is interesting is you can leave these to play over a long period and literally generate your own home sound environment, in real time, using your computer.

This is certainly a fascinating and innovate product. It comes on a double sided DVD-Rom (for Windows or the Mac), with a detailed descriptive booklet.

**Web:** <http://www.indie-cds.com>

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## **Ghosts** **Omnia Exeunt in** **Mysterium** **Formication** **Book, Deluxe, Download** **Dark Winter**



On the 16th August 2008, Formication released 'Ghosts (Omnia Exeunt in Mysterium)' as a DRM free, high quality MP3 download and deluxe hard-back book edition of nine signed copies at [www.theformicarium.com](http://www.theformicarium.com). The book is also available to purchase separately via Dark Winter, though only the first nine copies will be signed and feature an original print, taken from the book.

This is a startling work, original, edgy, incisive and textured. It gets under your skin very quickly and crates a dark even menacing mood. The tracks range from dark electronica with a driving beat which hammer directly into your skull to slow creeping tracks which ooze nightmares into your dreams.

This is a superb audio experience, a soundscape to experience the darkest of nights and one which needs to be regularly played so as to allow its atmosphere to envelop you. It is ambient at its very best exploring new territory and creating new moods and sounds...

Absolutely riveting!

Dark Winter has made available various tracks for advance listening, so go online and check it out, preferably late at night, alone....

**Web:** <http://www.darkwinter.com>



# Ghoultown

## Life After Sundown

### Zoviet Records 2008

Life After Sundown is Ghoultown's sixth album and it really showcases the band's unique sound. I had not heard Ghoultown before and I am very taken with their ability to harness different genres of music to create such a powerful and evocative sound. They have been described as "an uncharted crossroads between Johnny Cash and Rob Zombie." And I can see why, on this one album there is everything from punk to western soundtracks, horror-punk even metal to psychobilly and perhaps a dash of country, this is really a great album.



Each track is a unique experience – "Werewolves on Wheels" is a fast, strong, driving rock track, "Dead Outlaw" is western-themed psychobilly, "Against a Crooked Sky" is a western themed ballad of some beauty, while "Thunder over El Paso" is an instrumental !

"I Spit on your Grave" is a nasty and fun rock track (with some western and country influences) which doesn't take itself too seriously, while "Find a Good Horse" is a driving metal even thrash track with western instrumental riffs. Drink with the Living Dead is a very cool rock ballad with wicked lyrics.

Every track is a winner and there is a dark and brooding mood to many of the tracks which is the same time lightened by a witty and smart sense of humour. The overriding use of "western theme" outlaw horror makes it a unique package which is the ultimate embodiment of tequila drinking hillbilly rock.

**Web:** <http://www.zovietrecords.com>



### Logan's Run Soundtrack Screen Archives Film Score Silver Age Classics



Film Score Monthly was a superbly produced magazine exploring film music and soundtracks in all its myriad forms, it recently moved online and is now a paid digital magazine released on a monthly basis. It is available via subscription at a very reasonable rate and has a lot to offer.

At the same time what is most impressive is the range of CDs which are released by Screen Archives. These are of astounding quality and are quite unique. Many of them have never been released in any other CD format and those which are re-released have been remastered to the highest quality. Each of their releases has been produced with an eye for detail and a focus on getting each release perfect.

Logan's Run, for example, is a classic science fiction soundtrack which has been released in a limited edition of 3,000. The first thing you notice is the presentation, it is impeccable. The cover includes the classic Logan's Run image and the CD is a picture disc of the "Carousel" through which everyone who reaches 30 is supposed to be reborn.

The booklet is a comprehensive full colour 20 page booklet with not only a good overview of the film but a spread of rare photos. Logan's Run has been released by Special Arrangement with Turner Classic Movies Music and is a real gem for any Science Fiction fan.

Logan's Run was the epitome of late Seventies Science fiction, released by MGM just before Star Wars it was a strange mixture of end of the era disco style with warnings about the dangers of state controlled government.

it was a strange mixture of end of the era disco style with warnings about the dangers of state controlled government.

It was musically adventurous mixing two very different musical themes, one for the city, which while based on pleasure is somewhat barren since life ends at 30 and the world outside the city with all its potential for freedom but danger of being hunted and killed as you try to make it to sanctuary.

Logan's Run was originally released on LP at the time of the film, a forty two minute program which has twice been available on CD.

This new seventy four minute CD features the complete score resequenced into film order and remixed and remastered from the original multitrack elements.

Having heard one of the original CD releases this new edition is quite a startling experience, it shows far more depth and really places the music into context with the film.

There are all sorts of interesting musical motifs and unusual sound explorations and this remastered edition at last allows the listener to experience the music of Logan's Run as it was meant to be heard !

**Web:** <http://www.screenarchives.com>

**FSM Online:**  
<http://www.screenarchives.com/fsmonline/main.cfm>

### Lucio Fulci's Horror and Thriller Beat Records Italy

In 1996 the world lost a master of the macabre. He was a strange and eccentric filmmaker who will be as much remembered for his gruff exterior as for his obsessive dedication to his genre, but nevertheless he was a true horror maestro. Sadly, in live, he was often overshadowed by Dario Argento, at least in the public eye, and yet when we look in retrospect at the history of Italian Horror The Beyond certainly stands up there with Suspiria and indeed all of Fulci's films stand the test of time rather well. Indeed, today, many believe that his work embodies the spirit of macabre and confronting horror better than Argento, Bava and others.

He was certainly a flexible filmmaker who spending some half a century honing his craft, worked in a wide range of genres; however, from the Seventies onwards his horror films were the most successful. Visceral, violent, confronting and twisted are words that come to mind when describing his output.



One of the things that marked all of Fulci's films was his superior use of sound, whether it be ambient or environmental sound effects or his soundtracks, Fulci seemed to have an innate knack to choose just the right sound for the right scene to increase the level of gore and horror a hundred fold. His musical choices were always varied and included regular use of both progressive rock and jazz, in many cases these seemingly unusual choices helped make his films so much more than simply visual experience.

This impressive CD, Lucio Fulci: Horror and Thriller includes music from seven of his more memorable films; Una Lucertola Con La Pelle Di Donna, Lo Squareatore Di New York, Quella Villa Accanto Al Cimitero, Manhattan Baby, L'Aldila, Demonia and Door to Silence by such names as Ennio Morricone, Fabio Frizzi, Walter Rizzati and others.

These are quite exceptional choices, all are noteworthy and offer truly memorable audio experience. They are even better if you have seen the films, they will trigger some truly horrifying sensations in the back of your head as you listen to the music and remember the scenes in your imagination.

As per normal Beat Records practice, this is a high quality recording, beautifully presented. There is a lovely booklet discussing each of the films (in English and Italian) with some great pictures and images from the films. If you haven't seen them, the summaries and the music will certainly peak your interest !

Lucio Fulci's Horror and Thriller is a great soundtrack CD and one which will be of interest not only to horror film buffs and soundtrack collectors but to anyone interested in the unique progressive rock and jazz sound of the Seventies and Eighties.

**Web:** <http://www.beatrecords.it>

### Minus All Imperative Reaction Metropolis Records 2008

Minus All by Imperative Reaction a dark, powerful and energetic album which explores the boundaries of electronica, industrial and gothic music with splashes of rock.

Imperative Reaction was formed in 1996, their early albums such as Eulogy For The Sick Child and Ruined received rave reviews. Their ability to mix electronica and dance music with a darker edged sound and fierce vocals have created a quite a unique



sound. Influenced by everything from Nine Inch Nails and Marilyn Manson to dance music and gothic and heavy metal, Imperative Reaction has quite a following.



Minus All offers thirteen tracks of driving beat, combining an intoxicating dance floor rhythm with a startling sense of aggression every fury. There is a dark tone to all the lyrics and Ted Phelps has a strong and commanding voice which certainly knows how to hold a melody and yet has a surprising range.

The album opens with the aggressive and heavy "Minus All" and then moves into "Product" which has a far more minimalist electro feel, driven by a strong back beat and Phelps rasping vocals. Other notable tracks are "Functional", the ultimate dark dance track which has an awesome beat, awesome synth and a superb voice track.

"Panic Cycle" is another great dance track which is a great mixture of electro with a bruising vocal sound, it has a superbly maniac sound, while "In Decline" is a far more depressive and downbeat track using a dance beat to create a more nihilistic mood. Combined with textured synth this is a superbly reflective track.

Then we have a rather surprising dark electronic ballad in "You Remain". Here we find Phelps voice in a very different mode, offering a rather sad and melancholic track.

Minus All is a fascinating album. There is such a confluence of influences from electronica, goth, rock, industrial and dance, which are brought together into a polished and intoxicating mix.

**Web:** <http://www.metropolis-records.com>

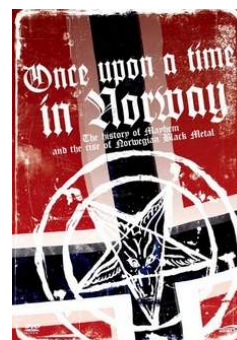
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**Once Upon a Time in  
Norway  
Another World Ent.  
R2 DVD**

Years ago I read the book "Lords of Chaos" and became fascinated by Norwegian Black Metal. It seems that during the Eighties young Norwegians inspired by bands like Venom mixed extreme expressions of metal music with ideas of Satanism and nihilism and create a unique cultural phenomenon. The genre became quite notorious in the early Nineties even going as far as setting churches on fire and for various murders.

While I greatly enjoyed "Lords of Chaos" I always

thought that a film would be the best way to actually hear from those involved and get a different angle from the highly biased media coverage.



Once Upon a Time in Norway is a refreshingly honest look at the rise of Black Metal in Norway. While there may be lots of documentaries on all aspects of heavy and black metal what stands out in my mind about Once Upon a Time in Norway is its "lack of agenda", it does not work to either denounce or promote Black Metal but simply documents the history and allows many of the participants to speak for themselves. It avoids the sensationalism found in most documentaries on the subject and works to offer an even handed overview of the history of Black Metal not simply as music but as a cultural phenomenon.

The documentary is broken up into categories such as Mayhem, Satan and Politics, Underground, Dead, Euronymous, Helvete, Soldiers, Black Metal Police etc, indeed there are thirteen sections in all plus an epilog. These are useful as they are not simply chapter breaks but are focus points for various key subjects of debate and discussion.

Throughout Once Upon a Time in Norway are interviews with Manheim (ex-Mayhem), Nocturno Culto (Darkthrone), priest Rolf Rasmussen, Tchort (Carpathian Forest), Anders Odden (Cadaver) and various others. The interviews are fascinating, offering a wide diversity of opinions and attitudes and talking honestly about everything ranging from power struggles, the media to violence and burning Churches. I was extremely impressed with the range of perspectives offered and the intelligence of the presentation of Upon a Time in Norway, it went way beyond the clichés and offered some fascinating insights into the Black Metal culture without attempting to impose a "once size fits all" model on why things occurred the way they did.

By allowing the people involved to speak for themselves, bluntly and honestly, it offers personal views of what occurred, including anecdotes, memories, opinions and analysis.

These interviews are for and against and it is nice to note that they have been minimally edited and do not seem to have been unnecessarily interrupted by lots of questions or comments. This is great first hand journalism.

There are some great extended interviews as well and a rather nice insert booklet, it is professionally presented and very highly recommended.

**Web:** <http://www.anotherworldent.com/>

## Parties Fines Soundtrack Compilation Vadim Music

A voluptuous journey through 70s French erotic cinema

This is quite a unique compilation, while there have been various compilations of German, Italian and American erotic film soundtracks, there has, surprisingly, been few titles to cover the French genre.

I find this quite strange considering the fact that there is a great diversity of high end French erotica cinema including some of the more significant titles.

It could also be said that the French soundtracks for such films are vastly superior to much that has passed for erotic music in, say, the US.

Without soundly too nasty, it must be said that many American erotic films have soundtracks which are bluntly dreadful and which rather than enhancing the cinematic experience do exactly the opposite.

Personally I think this comes from the general US ambiguity when it comes to erotic product, they both want it but are uncomfortable and even guilty about having it at the same time !

There is a class to both French erotica and the associated soundtracks which have always made it memorable and this collection is, in a word, outstanding.

Parties Fines is the first release in a series inviting you to experience the exotic and sensual world of the French erotic soundtrack.

Here you will experience the golden age of film excess with fifteen delectable tracks each carefully selected by selected by Monsieur Clouseau and Lord Library offering all manner of sensual pleasure.

Songs come from such diverse films as *Le Dernier Amant Romantique*, *Emmanuelle 4*, *Sex O'Clock USA*, *Premiers Désirs*, *Erotica* and various others. This selection offers some superb choices and is an absolutely marvellous introduction to the smooth sounds of French erotica.

There is a superb diversity of sound from seductive ballads to nostalgic lounge, from disco and funk to strange and unusual electronic explorations.

There is a comprehensive booklet included with the pack (in French and English) which gives a background to the tracks, so if you haven't seen these films, you will be tempted to go out and get them !



The CD itself is presented in a rather scrumptious digipack and is also available as a vinyl release.

Web: <http://www.vadimusic.com>

## Texas Fred Smith

Texas is a folksy, down to earth sort of album, packed with wit and humour and sly observations about human nature and cultural idioms. Fred Smith is an Australian musician who has been travelling and singing his way around the U.S. for about three years and recently returned home to release his album of observations and reflections.



Some have compared him to Billy Bragg, while I personally think he has more in common with the US folk tradition than anything else. His songs are relaxed, catchy and show great musical skill. But they are not simple folk music.

All of his music has something to say and while it generally tends to be subtle or packed in an amusing package, his insight always shines through. Songs such as "God Bless America" are more obviously satirical while "Don't Dig My Grave Too Deep" is genuinely moving.

Each track is a snapshot of a distinct stage of his journey across America, culminating in the six-and-a-half minutes epic of "American Guitar" which seems to summarize the whole trek.

This is an impressive album from one of Australia's best songwriters; it is just a shame that he isn't better known outside the folk circuit.

Perhaps this CD will help bring him to a wider audience.





## Traveler Vintage Science Fiction

Traveler is quite a trip. It combines some of my favourite genres into one package – electronic, dance, retro beats and science and space fantasy. Clearly inspired by the golden age of space travel and science fiction literature and film, it combines these together into a very cool package. It has a great retro sound influenced by the great orchestral sci fi tracks of the past mixed with quirky voice overs and sci fi dialogue, all to a dance beat. It is such a winning combination, retro futurism with dance and electronica. Clearly Vintage Science Fiction is destined for great things !

The CD opens with a traditional grand Science Fiction fanfare and then moves to a more solid dance number with Space Odyssey for Lovers, this has a great Eighties sci fi dance feel mixed with a great retro beat. While all the tracks are superb, a number stood out in my mind. Traveler, after which the album is named, is a more textured space oriented number with a laid back trance sound, while She has a Spaceship is a great campy dance number which reminded me of Barbarella !

Solitude is a truly accomplished piece with a great textured sound and for me is the very best on the album, while Infinity, which ends the album, is a superb electronic mellow melody.

As the first album from Vintage Science Fiction this is an accomplished and innovative album which combines a range of diverse elements including dance, retro, science fiction and fantasy into a truly memorable musical experience which I for one will be regularly listening to...

**Web:** <http://www.vintage-science-fiction.com>

### Unbelievably Bad #7

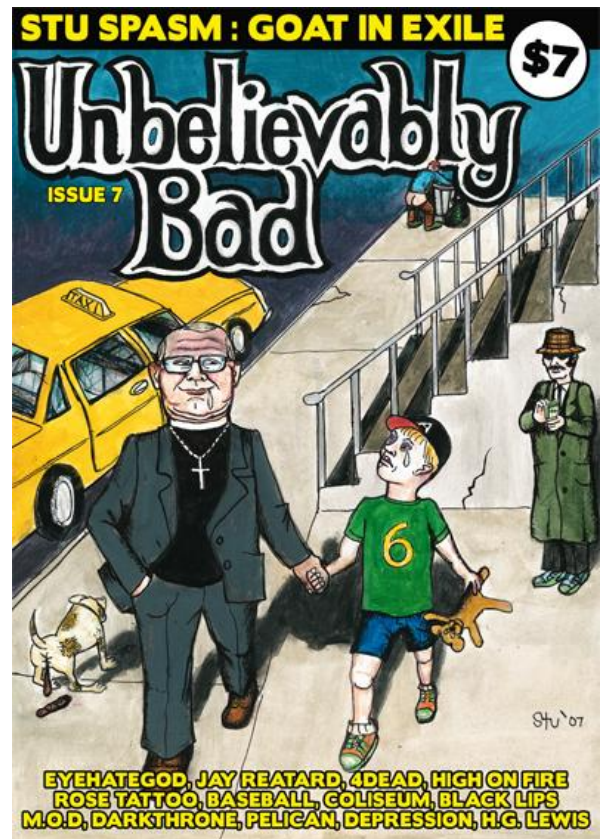
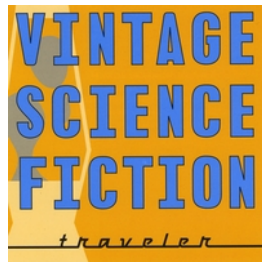
**Web:** <http://www.myspace.com/unbelievablybad>

**Email:** [unbelievablybad@optusnet.com.au](mailto:unbelievablybad@optusnet.com.au)

This is very cool irregularly published music magazine with lots of attitude. It is 100 pages with colour covers and packed with articles, interviews and music reviews focused on all manner of rock bands.

It covers the gambit of Rock including punk and metal as well.

Interviews in issue seven include Eyehategod, Jay Retard, 4Dead, High On Fire, Rose Tattoo, The Black Lips, Pelican and more. It even comes with a bonus 21-track CD featuring The Hellmenn, Straight Arrows, 4Dead, Violent Abuse, Kamikaze Trio, Bambi and The Bambis, Baseball, R.U.S.T, Mink



Jaguar, Vae Victus, Toecutter, The Veebees, Frank Rizzo, Hotel Wrecking City Traders, Kleber Claux Memorial Singers, Burning Sensation, Dead Farmers, Kill A Celebrity, Slag Dog Afterbirth, Fattura Della Morte and Doomed & Disgusting.

The interviews offered are comprehensive and well illustrated with photographs and there is also solid coverage of key festivals.

Throughout Unbelievably Bad are fun, obnoxious and sometimes informative short articles ranging from incredibly creepy movie stars to some comics and Freak of the week !

This is a superbly nasty rock magazine filled with attitude and brash reviews, it has a crass sense of humour, a what the f\*\* outlook and its reviews of CDs and DVDs are brazenly honest and there are lots of them. This is a great way to find out about the latest rock, punk and metal CD releases and get an unbiased opinion !

For \$7.00, it is incredible value - I don't know how they can produce such a great magazine and a CD for the price !

It is sold through a range of independent stores such as Redeye Records, Polyester Books etc, the full list is at the MySpace site, if you can't find it email the direct:

[unbelievablybad@optusnet.com.au](mailto:unbelievablybad@optusnet.com.au)



**Mark Wasyl**

**Web:** <http://dropdeadsexy.net/>

Mark Wasyl is an Los Angeles based artist bringing the world his own brand of pop culture which mixtures a naughty sense of play with a lot of bite !

His work is marked by clean lines, luxurious style, bold colors, and sensuous curves. While he occasionally uses models, his work is primarily "imaginative", these are the girls of the twilight, shaped from the stuff of dream where they scratch as much as they kiss. His trademark is tattooed girls embellished with skulls, flames and stars.

The girls are a quirky mix of innocence with attitude, they are young and bratty and definitely "in your face". Heavily inspired by music, pop culture and the modern pinup, it comes as no surprise that the major focus of his work is Girls, dark culture and Rock 'n' Roll with a dash of punk! His devil girls, tattooed gun toting hotties and graphic embellished chicks are beauties with a dash of danger and his pentagrams, skulls and other related items are stylish and chic.

His website is packed with goodies and is a work of art in itself and includes a comprehensive Pin Up Section, a Blog and a store packed with goodies from posters to stickers, pinups and books.

The "Drop Dead Sexy Pin Up Book" is filled with Mark's Devil Girls, Inked up gun toting chicks with attitude and Rock n' Roll inspired motifs. It has some 55 illustrations and is in full colour. Each one of this



pictures is a real work of art and could be just as easily framed !

The posters and pictures are superb. One that is especially nice is "the Afflicted Girl" - it is a very high quality one color silkscreen, with metallic ink on black stock. It is a great size (12"x18") and a limited edition of 150 signed by the artist. The Dark Red edition is especially catching.

The "Spice" prints are superb large premium collector's prints signed and printed on Premium Archival paper using archival inks. They are a great size (11.75" x 16.5") for framing and will make an impressive addition to any chic home.





Mark makes sure you get these goods in perfect condition; prints are carefully packed in protective sleeves with backing boards and shipped flat.

We received some goodies via the post to Australia and they arrived in perfect condition and considering the mail system it tells you how much care Mark takes to make sure you get your goods in superb condition.

There are also lots of nice vinyl stockers ranging from pinups to Frankenskull and some great note cards as well.

Drop Dead Sexy offers a wide range of great products, if you love Pinups with attitude, you will love this site and want to buy some of the products available. The Pinup blog offers all sorts of great links, news and reviews about Pinups girls with the aim of creating a new generation pinup girl. Looking at Mark's work, I think he is well on the way !

## SPECIAL GIVEAWAY

Drop Dead Sexy has given us a range of items to giveaway, this is special promotion only within the digital and print edition of Synergy. It has not been advertised on the website !



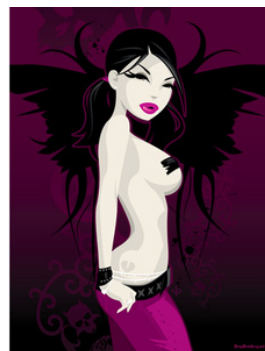
### The Afflicted Girl Dark Red Edition

This is a high quality color silkscreen, with metallic ink on black stock. It is a great size (12"x18") and a limited edition of 150 signed by the artist.

Send an email to [promotions@synergy-magazine](mailto:promotions@synergy-magazine) with "The Afflicted Girl" in the subject line, make sure you include your full name, email and mailing address in the email.



Send an email to [promotions@synergy-magazine](mailto:promotions@synergy-magazine) with "Drop Dead Sexy Book" in the subject line, make sure you include your full name, email and mailing address in the email.



### Divine Poster (We have a few to giveaway)

Each poster comes signed.

Printed in full color and on 100 lb gloss coated stock. Size: 18 "x24"

Send an email to

[promotions@synergy-magazine](mailto:promotions@synergy-magazine)

with "Divine" in the subject line, make sure you include your full name, email and mailing address in the email.



We also have some stickers and cards we will randomly send to competition entries. So send your emails in.

The Drop Dead Sexy Giveaway runs until **November 31st**.

Entries will be accepted worldwide.

## **Juxtapoz Art and Culture Magazine Monthly**

Juxtapoz is a high quality glossy art and culture magazine, produced monthly and around 100 pages in size. But don't let that fool you, it is unconventional, challenging, intelligent and above all entertaining !



Every issue is packed with news, reviews, artist profiles, features and more. Juxtapoz is a very comprehensive "art" magazine with coverage of everything from the latest collectibles through to quirky art, prints, fashion and so on. There are also specific special issue, for example, September 2008 was the "New York City Graffiti Issue".

The September 2008 "New York City Graffiti Issue" was a real beauty, 150 pages in length and packed with content. The cover Seen designed the newsstand cover, while KR or KRINK did a special piece for our subscriber cover. There were features on Seen, Ket, Freedom, Haze, Quik, Revolt, Ghost, Crash, Cycle, Lady Pink, and Tuff City Tattoo (Yes 2, Med, and Ces), plus interviews with KR, Mare 139, West, Daze, and Chino. Plus, there are profiles on Cope 2, SP.One, Claw Money, Jest, Erni, Stay High 149, Noah, Pure, Ezo, Iz the Wiz, and Smith.

It is hard to define what the style of Juxtapoz is, however, in my mind it fits into the category of pop surrealism. It was founded by Robert Williams in 1994 and since then has proved a highly successful formula and reaches a wide and diverse audience; it has also given many major artists their first exposure including Mark Ryden. Juxtapoz has a superbly unconventional approach to art.

Tradition and Art establishment conventions clearly do not apply here, Juxtapoz doesn't print essays on the theory of art theory, old world painting or lists of America's top collectors - just art and artists who matter, it is clearly at the cutting edge of modern art.

The quality of the publishing is top notch which is important for an art magazine, the colours are clear and bright and the look and the feel of the magazine is one would hope – cool, sophisticated and eye-catching.

Subscriber issues also include special edition covers and there are special offers on subscriptions.

**Web:** <http://www.juxtapoz.com>

## **Sweet Wishes**

**Mark Ryden and Marion Peck  
Porterhouse Fine Art Editions 2008**

Mark Ryden's work is a fascinating enigma, on one level it has always seemed to me to be a form of surrealism with strong symbolic elements. However, these are expressed through contemporary and historical images, pop culture figures and even what could be considered a kitsch of iconography. This mixture of the surreal and pop culture, religious and profane, unconscious and conscious creates a "dynamic clash" which is quite unique to his work and why he is so popular.

Sweet Wishes is a prime example of both the quality of his work in a visual sense and his unusual sense of play. Adapted from a short film by himself and Marion Peck, this is a fairytale presented using a doll, a baby doll and a teddy bear and lots of cake and food. It is beautifully presented in rich textured images with an impeccable sense of colour and presentation.

It is a strange book in that it presents such an innocence yet you are unsure of what is actually being communicated, there is something edgy about dolls, baby and teddy bears overindulging ! It is a strange book in that it presents such an innocence yet you are unsure of what is actually being communicated, there is something edgy about dolls, baby and teddy bears overindulging !

On one level it is the tale of Doll, Bear and Baby whose wish is granted by a fairy. Their collective desire is for food goodies and lots of them and they eat until they are sick. The strange images of dolls, bears and babies covered in food and then vomiting are both appealing and repelling. The book ends as they all agree they would do it again if they had a chance – an observation on human nature for all ages if there is one.

This is a lovely 56 page hardback volume of superior quality, high definition images and with a quirky and unusual tale !

**Web:** <http://www.porterhouseart.com>







**Shadows in Heaven**  
**David Aronson**  
**Leslie Powell**

Shadows in Heaven is a superb self published work illustrated by David Aronson with words by Leslie Powell.

It is a unique collaboration between two artists using two mediums, art and words to explore the crevices of the unconscious, the power of symbolism as well as dreams and nightmares.

The images have been created with ink, graphite and Photoshop and the text moves through poetry, short tales and dialogues.

The imagery is dark, surreal and arresting; it has a sort of "Freudian" fairy tale feel mixed with explorations of sexuality, childhood, pain, suffering and the nature of human experience. It is disturbing, compelling and fascinating at the same time. I use the term fascination here in its original "sense" - it captures the view and makes you look deeply into yourself, regardless of the emotions the image engenders.

The quality of the art cannot be faulted; it is beautifully reproduced in stunning detail. It has 52 pages and is also available as a digital download.

The Alchemical Wedding website is also packed with interesting materials including The Alchemical Tarot, Shadows in Heaven, original art and prints and lots of other work by Aronson, it is well worth spending some time exploring his world !

**Web:** <http://www.alchemicalwedding.com>



**when this key sketch gets real tongue is fork  
 hen is cock  
 when this key sketch gets real my baby eagle's  
 dream comes true**  
**Drawings by Natesh**  
**Blaft Publications 2008**  
**India**

**Web:** <http://www.blaft.com/>

It is hard to describe this unusual but evocative book illustrated by Natesh, a Chennai based artist. While he is much better known for his installation artworks and colorful paintings, which have recently been exhibited, this is a selection of fine art ink drawings.

It is clear these images are influenced by the Surrealistic movement, they mutate between an amazing array of forms with humans, animals and objects transforming from one thing into another.

At times it is hard to actually define what is being shown as they appear different from various angles and even seem to change between viewings.

There is a "unconscious" theme throughout the world exploring sexuality, taboo, passion and the nature of desire. It is quite surprising what can be done with very simple line art and this selection of some seventy ink drawings is well worth getting hold of.

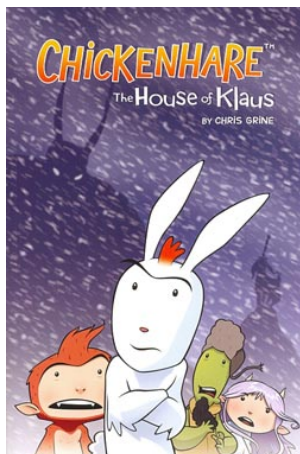


# COMICS & GRAPHIC NOVELS



## **Chickenhare The House of Klaus Chris Grine Dark Horse Books**

Chris Grine is a very talented artist who has created a rather unique and strange little character called Chickenhare, you see Chickenhare is a cross between a chicken and a hare (alright, he is a hare with the feet and feathers of a chicken) and with his friends is always on for an adventure.



In *The House of Klaus*, Chickenhare and his friend Abe (who happens to be a cute as a button bearded little turtle) are having a very bad day. They are their way to the cold wastes of the polar region, with Banjo, and Meg, to be sold to Klaus, a rather nasty taxidermist who has some creepy end in store for them. He does weird and strange things to animals and they do not wish to be stuffed.

Along the way our team meets with a tribe of beasties called the Shromph who are, at first, convinced our friends should be their next meal and the ghost of a dead goat called Mr. Buttons who wears a top hat and a monocle.

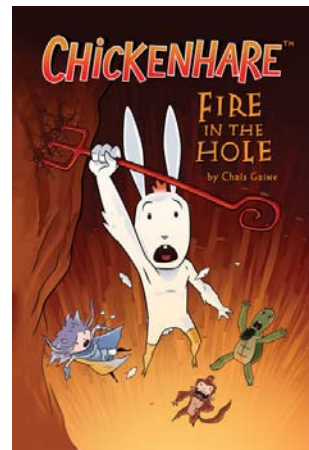
This is a beautifully drawn graphic novel, presented in black and white with a superb clear lines and an easy to follow style, at the same time the content is witty, humorous and has some rather dark edges especially Klaus's house and this gives the story some impressive depth. There are lots of surprises in *The House of Klaus*, some great character development and, of course, a beautifully illustrated and designed book.

Grine is rather dedicated to Chickenhare and is always eager to share him with new readers and hence his site is filled with information and even offers free sample sections of both Volume 1 and 2 of Chickenhare for you to check out.

**Web:** <http://www.chickenhare.com/>

## **Chickenhare: Fire in the Hole Chris Grine Dark Horse Books**

Chickenhare and his friend Abe had a narrow escape from Klaus the taxidermist, but that is going to be a walk in the park compared to their adventures in *Fire in the Hole*. Chickenhare, Abe and Scabby, a seafaring Shromph will have to not only summon all their courage but use their brains as well as they battle against witches and demons in this new Chickenhare tale.



I must admit I have been seduced by Chickenhare, it is beautifully drawn, has great characters and has an innocence that harkens back to the earliest days of comic book art. At the same time there is a dark edge and humour bubbling under the surface which makes it just as enjoyable for adults as well as kids. *Fire in the Hole*, certainly, has more of its share of Witches and Demons and I like the way in which it has something for everyone. Grine has also refined his storytelling in this volume; it certainly includes far more wit and humour and is a bit more refined in terms of plot with some nice twists and turns.

Once again the quality of Grine's style cannot be faulted, lovely panels, refined use of lines and a superb use of the interaction between black and white. I am especially impressed by the details in the faces, the various characters look incredibly real and their facial expressions are so complex.

This is a superb volume, a great read and indeed, a damn nice work of cartoon art.

Grine also offers a free 20 page preview of *Fire in the Hole* on his website. So go online, have a good look and I feel sure you will be impressed enough you will order copies forthwith !

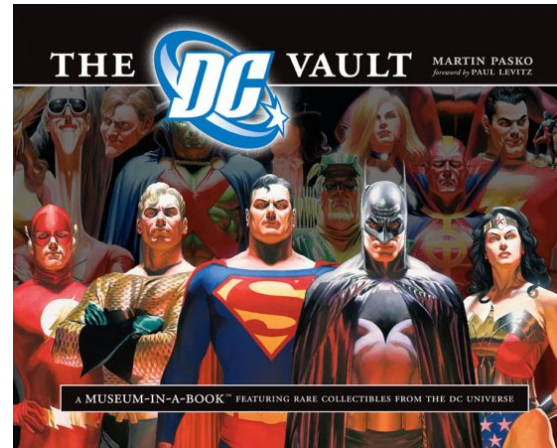
**Web:** <http://www.chickenhare.com/>





# THE DC VAULT

Running Press 2008  
Distributor: Bookwise Australia



In 1935, popular culture was forever changed when DC Comics published the first book of "all new, all original" comic material. To the delight of millions of readers everywhere, the modern comic book was born, and from its pages came leaping a bewildering array of characters. The Superhero was born from the crucible of the World War and from that time has continued to tap into our deepest dreams and desires to become a major motif with literature and cinema. World War II cemented the significance of the Superhero as the collective reservoir of courage against all odds, however during the post war Hero the motif hit hard time, leading to the evolution of more genre based comics focused on crime and horror.

At the same time the onset of extreme censorship and moral crusades against comic book violence in the Forties and Fifties (sadly far longer in Australia), reduced many of the Superhero tales to no more than trivialities and many consider that the Golden Era of comic existed prior to this period. In the 1950s Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman made a surprise comeback but in a form which somewhat lack flair due to the effect of the censorship of the period.

The Superhero, however, is not just a product of the experience of War. It could be equally said that the earliest religious document, The Epic of Gilgamesh is focused on a Superhero and indeed his description as someone who is outside cultural forms and has superhuman strength has many comic book resonances. Of course Robin Hood and the Scarlet Pimpernel in Victorian literature also could fall into

this category, as does Zorro etc, all were "Masked Heroes". It was also during this period that many classic texts were written on the "Hero ethic" as a development from the early Chivalric codes and hence the Hero became the embodiment of what a young man should aspire to. During this period



there was, however, a dearth of female Superheroes since the goal of womanhood in the Victorian period was defined by the prevailing male Heroic model and hence seen as housewife and child bearer.

In the early 20th century as pulp fiction developed as well as comic book art, the Superhero united the Heroic vision of early literature with strange superman powers which could be seen as have a vaguely religious flair. In many ways they are like the ancient Greek gods in masked form.

There has been much debate about the psychology of the Superhero with criticism levelled against it for sexism, classism and the glorification of violence. It is interesting to note that another less documented debate has been about the religious motifs within the Superhero model. One of the artists involved in the development of Spiderman Steve Ditko was an avowed atheist and believed that the continued use of too many supernatural elements in the comic was destroying its integrity. This sadly led to a major split with Stan Lee and Ditko continues to continue to work but only with the domain of his own independent work.

The debates about the Superhero become especially heated during the Nineties with the development of the Anti-hero and the rise of extreme and graphically violent comic book content. Coming into the 21st first many of these criticisms are largely considered mute since diversity is slowing moving into the Superhero genre and there is more than enough room for many differing interpretations and adaptations.

Each decade adapted and tailored the Superhero legend, his or her form changed according to current



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enough room for many differing interpretations and adaptations.

Each decade adapted and tailored the Superhero legend, his or her form changed according to current events and was expressed in a different form. This also saw the rise of the female Superhero, first as a partner to the male Superhero (but at times still very ambiguous such in the case of Catwoman) and later as an independent Superhero (Wonder Woman). In recent time we have even seen the development of Gay Superheroes, admittedly these are still primarily in non mainstream publications, but the comic book hero Rage made an appearance in the very popular "Queer as Folk" and a sub theme throughout the series was the comic book store of Ben and his partner was a lecturer on the cultural motifs in comic book art.

As times have changed, so has the medium, and the Superhero ideal has been expressed in comics, books, graphic novels, collectables, serials, movies, TV series and then, of course, after the Superhero Blockbusters of the Superman, Spiderman and Batman Franchises, there has been a revival of interest. With the recent record breaking success of the latest Batman movie, "The Dark Knight", starring Heath Ledger and Christian Bale the Superhero is now going from strength to strength, if not in a rather darker form.

With this revival comes a great interest in the heyday of Superhero comics and while this is a welcome return to style, it means getting hold of such publications is difficult and costly. The market of second hand comics is having great success with many earlier publications achieving frighteningly high prices. While this can be seen as a reward for artists and companies who have worked for many years to achieve this level of success, it makes it very difficult for the collector.

Some time ago a unique product was developed to resolve this quandary. "The Marvel Vault" (also distributed in Australia by Bookwise), offered a full col-

our history of the company and its comics and heroes with reproductions of rare art, drawings and even included removable reproductions in plastic sleeves.

This has been followed with "The DC Vault", this time focused on DC Comics and since it was the home to such amazing Superheroes as Batman, Superman, Wonder Woman and Sandman, it is a truly attention grabbing product.

From its superb presentation in a full colour oversized hardback folder to its history of DC Comics illustrated with rare photos, drawings, doodles and images this is a unique publication. It includes literally hundreds of rarely seen images and allows the reader to actually see the evolution of some of the most significant Superhero characters of all time. In addition, and this is what really stands out, is an inter-

active scrapbook which includes removable reproductions of rare comics, memorabilia and significant items which are all stored in plastic sleeves. These have been painstaking reproduced to archival quality and get you the closest you are likely to get to the real thing. Many of these items have never been seen outside the archives of DC Comics or the libraries of collectors. Just some examples include a working reproduction of a 1942 Junior Justice Society of America decoder and a series of Public Service Announcements starring Superman and Batman.

This is a superior quality publication and offers something which really is both book and collectable. It is beautifully made with an eye for detail.

It is clear that the designers of the package spent a lot of time in research, since it includes everything a DC Comics fanatic would want, both in terms of content and reproductions. It is a one off item and really quite something !





## Jim Blanchard Comics

Web: <http://www.jimblanchard.com>

### Kids, People, Gods & Dogs

#### Bad Meat #3 and Cruel World #1

Jim Blanchard produces a range of wild, confronting and amusing graphic comics. The first thing you immediately notice is his unique style. He has a superb observational eye and the detail in his work is quite astounding, and this detail ranges from his nicely presented portraits to his explosively explicit and taboo breaking adults only comics.

Kids, for example, is a simple series of portraits, each one drawn with a high level of skill and with a direct style. It is a small booklet with a cynical sense of humour, each image had a simple by-line which helps express the nature of the image. These range from "Blame the Father" to "Jesse Did Her".

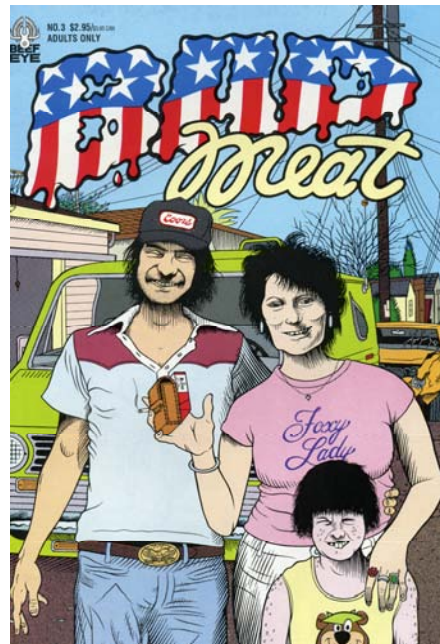


Another booklet of portraits is just called People, without descriptions, you can simply allow the images to communicate the personalities he has chosen to show.

A larger portraiture collection is called Gods and Dogs and includes a superb range of images of humans, and some dogs. It includes some well known figures such as Sammy Davis Jnr, Karl Marx and Fredreich Nietzsche to unusual interpretations such as Rambo Hitler, Herve Villacheize (Tattoo from Fantasy Island as a nude angel with a gun in his hand – a reference to his sad life and strange suicide) and many others. Many of these images can be examined for quite a long time before you pick up all the details, they are complex with many levels of meaning both visually and symbolically. It is a nice work.

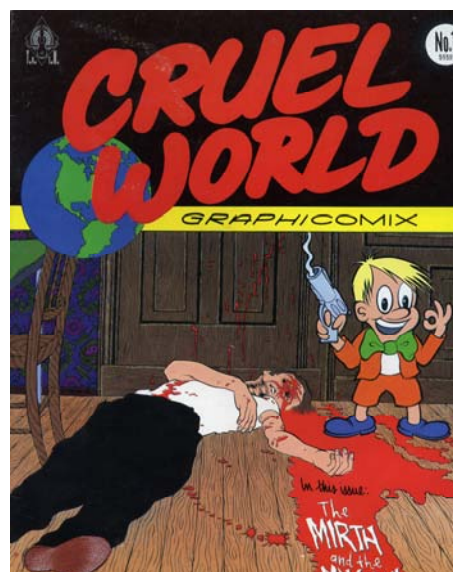


Bad Meat No. 3 is where Jim gets truly bent and truly outrageous. This is such a flash back for me to the old world of dirty underground comics, it is so good it sticks to your fingers. It is beautifully perverse and co-stars Jim Goad, Ivan Stang (Sub Genius), Pat Moriarity, Dennis Eichhorn and Chris Kegel, a superb mix to say the least. Some of the full page images such as Stoned Jerome and Your Mom are especially nice and the 100th Bonobo by Ivan Stang Chief Poobah of the Church of the Sub Genius brings it a philosophical feel ! Bad Meat #3 is 32 pages and obviously Adult Only.



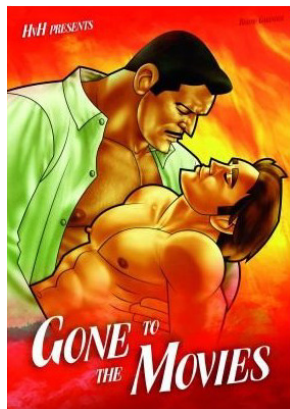
Cruel World No 1 is an excursion into the world of sociopathic graphic art, with fascinating and strange stories and a range of different artistic styles. Crime-sexy are classic examples of Jim's portraiture adapted from crime photographs each one accompanied by the excuse used to justify the crime. The Attack of the 500 Ft Hippy is a lovely spread sending up 50's horror films and the wild rampages of the hippies and psychedelics. The execution of Carl Jung is an intelligent and rather erudite exploration of the weirder aspects of Jungian psychology coupled with truly impressive deranged psychedelic cartoons ! There are also some very nice full page images and of course the impressive colour covers front and back. Cruel World #1 is 40 pages.

There is a lot of fascinating stuff here, Blanchard has a great style, a dark and cynical sense of wit which is biting yet painfully honest and cuts to the chase. His adult works are especially enthralling, painstakingly prepared filled with perverse surprises, interesting ideas and provocative concepts.



**Gone to the Movies**  
**HvH**  
**Bruno Gmuender 2008**  
**Bulldog Books**  
**(Australia)**

The world of cinema posters will never be the same. While we have always been entertained by the subtle homoerotic hints within Hollywood advertising now they have never been more blatant. HvH has taken the well known (and some rather famous) movie posters and subverted them into new territories. The names, places and actors have been changed to protect the innocent (and not so innocent) but parody is always clear !



The subtle has become obvious and hilarious - sometimes they are fun, other times ironical even sarcastic, often rude, but always beautifully presented and hilariously fun. Who couldn't be amused by "Cockapatra" starring Lickbeth Gaylor, Dick Burbon and Sex Garrison presented by 69th Century-Fox !

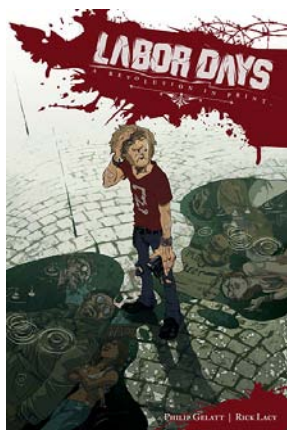
This is a high quality hardback of vibrant colour, each illustration is reproduced in stunning detail. Indeed, there is more in the detail than you first notice so spend some time and you will be surprised.

HvH is a well respected cartoonist whose work is also found in Freshmen and Men magazines, this is his first book and is both a loving tribute to cinema and a insightful and amusing subversion of the Hollywood image.

**Web:** <http://www.brunogmuender.com>

**Labor Days**  
**Philip Gelatt and Rick Lacy**

Benton "Bags" Bagswell likes to do nothing, his approach to life is "take it easy" no matter what - he is a true slacker. While he is a handyman for hire and does all manner of menial work to create an income, it is not of any great significance to his. All this changes on one fateful day when he is unceremoniously dumped by his girlfriend and finds a mysterious videotape.



Thrust into a dangerous world of deceit and betrayal, it's up to Bags to pick himself up off the bar floor and hit the road in search of the truth! Labor Days is a globe-trotting hijinks, surreal comedic adventure as

our unlikely hero tries to grow out of his slacker life style and into the enigma that's blown up his former existence!

"We were so fortunate to get this pitch," said Editor-in-Chief James Lucas Jones. "Philip Gelatt is an undiscovered talent and Rick Lacy is one of our favorite artists. Labor Days is like The Big Lebowski, Get Smart and Die Hard all rolled into one book. Hysterical antics, good plot, action packed, and over the top. We're really excited about this book."

"Bags is like Jeffrey Lebowski... if he thought he was John McClane," commented Marketing Director Cory Casoni. "I love the characters in Labor Days. They're some of the best you'll ever find in a character-driven story like this. Quirky and bizarre, even the bad guys are lovable!"

"Labor Days is like a smoothie made up of James Bond movies, mid-twenties malaise, and toss-away scraps of social theory. Blended with a heroic amount of booze and an epic amount of fantastic artwork. Mmmm booze and malaise," joked writer Philip Gelatt. "Writing Labor Days was a lot of fun, mostly because it has lots of characters I wish actually existed. In fact, sometimes I forget that we just made Bags up. I pull my phone out and try to call him and then have to sheepishly put it away."

"This book has taught me a lot," said artist Rick Lacy. "And I taught it a number of things right back! 'I'm Rick Lacy, damn it, and you're not!' I would say to it. People would stare. But I didn't care. Because they'll know when they read it. They'll all know... I guess this book has made me a bit insane. But it was the best fun I've ever had drawing it."

"I really love revolution as a concept, or a dramatic concept at least," concluded Gelatt. "And Labor Days is about a bunch of people who are all after their own revolutions and fail to get them. And one guy who isn't after any revolution at all ends up finding one."

Labor Days is by Philip Gelatt with art by Rick Lacy, this is volume 1 and has 144 pages black and white pages with a colour cover. It is superb looking graphic novel, there is a great use of texture and shade and the detail in each frame is impressive. The characters are well developed and the plot is action packed to say the least.

The Oni Press website includes a 24 page preview !

**Web:** <http://www.onipress.com>





## Planet Lovecraft Issue #2

H.P. Lovecraft was a writer of the horror, fantastical tales and the macabre. His novels and short stories have become favourites of those outsiders interested in true dark fiction and any potential list of adaptations of his works would be truly immense. The sheer diversity of the Lovecraft "universe" today is breathtaking, from RPG games to splatter films (who can forget *From Beyond* and the *Re-Animator*), indie films to novels, chapbooks and tales.

However, I have always felt that due to the fantastical nature of Lovecraft's works that graphic illustration was great way to express the nature of the mythos that has developed from this work and this is certainly what is found in the pages of *Planet Lovecraft*.

*Planet Lovecraft* is up to issue Two and has 56 pages, it has an awesome colour cover of Cthulhu by Terry Pavlet. Volume One was very well received and it is good to see that Volume Two is reaching an even larger audience. The stories are superior in quality and beautifully illustrated. I especially like the way in which you have different new explorations of the "Lovecraftian" universe and how these tales, illustrated by different artists, offer us different styles of comics and illustrations. There is even an article called "Pickman's Modem" offering musings on Lovecraft on the internet.

The quality of the printing is superb. I especially notice this on the *Well* by Rob Corliss and Knightgaunt, both great stories but which also use a lot of shades of gray and this would have been a disaster with lower quality production.

This is a great magazine, well edited, nicely formatted and high quality with top class illustration. It offers a creative way of exploring the Lovecraft mythos in various genres and styles.

Highly recommended.

**Web:** <http://www.planetlovecraftmagazine.com/>

## Satan's 3-Ring Circus of Hell Robert Steven Rhine Asylum Press

*Satan's 3-Ring Circus of Hell* is a powerful horror anthology exploring all manner of horror and transgressive subject matter. Writer Robert Steven Rhine

has filled this visually stunning volume with some forty or so short stories featuring gore, sex, violence, zombies, sex, horror and ever other possible dark genre.

The stories are all created in different styles and hence you get a diverse range of artistic expression from full colour gore to black and white comics, fake adverts to full page cartoons. Rhine has brought together a literal cornucopia of artists such as William Stout, Tim Vigil, John Cassaday, Jim Smith and Steve Bissette, indeed there is art from over forty artists in this one volume so really is a intense journey into wild territory. Intense is in many ways a good word, Rhine has a very wild and sick imagination as well as a dark and perverse approach to horror, at the same time this is matched with a great sense of humour, so even in the darkest tales there is usually a dose of wit and some tongue in cheek humour.

*Satan's 3-Ring Circus of Hell* is a truly strange volume, some of the art is incredibly beautiful such as *The Great Cthulhu* while other stories are just so grotesque you want to look away but can't. There are all sorts of unusual stories here from an army private who is the guinea pig for a top secret drug which prolongs emotions and feelings to a Hollywood graveyard bus tour which literally digs up the dirt on deceased stars.

There is a zombie eating competition, *Separation Anxiety* invites into the world of freak love and desires gone very much awry, there are tales of plastic surgery, even a story (*Gas Pains*) about a woman who gives birth to snakes, there some rather perverse full page adverts, the *Symposium* about a vampire convention and lots and lots more.

*Satan's 3-Ring Circus of Hell* is 256 pages in length with 120 pages in color and 136 pages in black and white half toned and hence packed with intense ground breaking content.

As with other products by Rhine the production values are the very best. The colour quality is superb and the detail in the black and white comics is quite astounding. This is a product of the highest quality, extreme, outrageous and transgressive, just like I like 'em ! There is something to shock, offend, stimulate and horrify everyone here. In other words, it is a great buy !

**Web:** <http://www.asylumpress.com>

**Also see:** *Girls and Corpses*

**Web:** <http://www.girlsandcorpses.com/>



## **Split Lip Volume 1 Local Act Comics**

Split Lip is an internet site which offers a range of horror tales by Sam Costello illustrated by different artists. The stories represent the “new breed” of horror, rather than focusing on vampires, werewolves and “old school” horror Costello spins new forms of morbid and dark tales which will haunt your dreams for quite a while.



Indeed, this work was so well received online, that the “Horror Blog” noted that “Split Lip is the predominant original horror comic on the internet”. At the same time, at least for me, online comics lack the unique quality of having one in hand to read, touch and experience.

Local Act has produced a superb volume of Slip Lip which represents what I like in a book. It is superbly presented with a lovely cover which has quite a nice embossed feel, the printing is of the highest quality and is visually arresting. It looks like the real deal before you even start reading it !

As soon as you begin reading you know you are in for a dark ride. There are seven stories by Costello, each one illustrated by a different artist, this is especially enjoyable as it offers different visual interpretations of each tale and also gives you different “tastes” in style and illustration.

Each take has its own unique ambiance and since I will not spoil the tales by plot summaries what I will say they represent the cutting edge of horror, visceral and violent, yet intelligent with intriguing concepts and ideas behind them.

There is a strong mood and texture to each tale which take them way outside traditional horror fare.

This is a publication which is certainly worth getting a copy, 100 pages of high quality horror, beautifully produced for \$20.00 – great quality at a very reasonable price !

**Web:** <http://www.localactcomics.com.au>

**Split Lip Web:**  
<http://www.webcomicsnation.com/splitlip/>

## **The Undersea Adventures of Capt'n Eli Volume 1**

The Undersea Adventures of Capt'n Eli is a real treat. It has been forged in the tradition of Flash Gordon and Buck Rogers and harks back to the days of a boy's own adventure, 20 thousands leagues under the sea and Jules Vernes.



At the same time it has been produced with the very latest styles including beautifully drawn solid comics, three dimensional modeling and special effects. It offers vibrant and stunning colour, a great plot and very clear text.

The combination of different styles makes this quite an unusual graphic novel—it is not often you see a comic which has three dimensional rendered images, cartoons, special effects and others graphic styles melded together.

The originality of the comic is much the same with how the project developed. Capt'n Eli is actually the name for a well established and much loved Soda made In Maine, which is handcrafted in small batches and sold nationwide throughout the USA.

The Soda was founded by Founded by Fred Forsley in 1997 and since that of play was expressed in his product, Fred felt this same sense of fun could be instilled in an adventure story. That's where Jay Piscopo and Nemo Publishing come in!

The moment you open this book you know you have found something very special. This is the story of a boy with extraordinary scientific abilities and unusual ties to the sea.

Join Eli as he dives into the Sargasso Sea and meets the mysterious Golden Age hero Commander X, along the way there is everything you would expect from such a tale – underwater secrets, mini subs, lost civilizations, monsters, robots and more.

This is a superb example of the significance of independent comics – the true personal vision of Jay Piscopo in all its creativity has been sustained as well as the highest production values.

The Undersea Adventures of Capt'n Eli Volume one features pin-ups by comics greats Steve Rude, Herb Trimpe and Howard Chaykin and a cover by Steve Rude. It is 104 full colour pages.

**Web:** <http://www.captneli.com>



# TOYS & COLLECTIBLES



## **Cinema of Fear Mezco**

Mezco Toyz joins forces with New Line Cinema's House of Horrors, New Line's licensing division for Friday the 13th, Texas Chainsaw Massacre and A Nightmare on Elm Street, to bring a fresh new perspective to the House of Horrors collectible category. The first assortment of Screen Grabs (your favorite horror movie moment captured in a mini diorama) will be released under the Mezco horror brand Cinema of Fear.



The first assortment includes notable moments from all three horror films, A Nightmare on Elm Street Part 3, Texas Chainsaw Massacre and Friday the 13th. Mezco, as anticipated, continues to put a spin on the traditional collectible and this time the results are highly detailed mini Screen Grabs

**Web:** <http://www.mezcotoyz.com>

## **Wow Wee Funtastic Australia Femisapien**

Femisapien is an intelligent and highly interactive female robot who can dance, sing and even kiss!

An incredibly graceful and agile 'bot, Femiapien is loaded with functionality. Her high tech design allows her to move independently in distinctively feminine, fluid ways and respond to her user's gestures, touch and sounds.

She is the latest in a line of sophisticated, walking, talking, personality-packed robots from the clever team at WowWee, who decided the highly successful Robosapien needed a girlfriend!

The Femisapien can sing, dance, walk and hand out

business cards! With a song initiated dancing mode, she detects when music is playing and shimmies along. And, she kisses! If your head comes close to the robot, her love mode kicks in and you receive a kiss!

Femisapien features a revolutionary interface that consists of touch, tap and hand gestures combined with the ability to learn a routine of poses and then play them back on demand.

There are no complex remote controls to use – performances can be created and played literally in seconds.

Simply tilt her head to access her three modes - Attentive Mode with interactive wandering, seeing, hearing and dancing; Learning Mode to program a routine of movements and Responsive Mode to play the routine back and for additional walking patterns and styles. U

sing her responsive joystick hands, you can access more than 56 actions and interactive routines and maybe even uncover some of her 68 hidden functions.

Femisapien speaks in Emotish, which sounds rather like humming the sounds behind words.

And she can interact with and even control other WowWee robots, which can lead to some interesting surprises!

WowWee Femisapien was released in the Australian Market during October 2008 and retails from Toys 'r' Us and independent toy stores for RRP\$199.95.



**HB II: Hellboy**  
**Mezco**  
**2008 Con**  
**Exclusive**

Hellboy II is a rather nice collectible from Mezco, it includes the Samaritan Big Baby Shotgun and a display base. Hellboy in this design has a cigar in his mouth and the limited 2008 Con Exclusive edition (2500 only) shows him with a black shirt.



There are also other figures in the series including Johan Krauss, Liz Sherman and Wink.

It is an extremely detailed 3 3/4" figure - the sculpting on this figure is superior - impressive when you consider the size. I really like the detail in the head, it has excellent texture and looks very realistic. The proportions are solid and the jacket etc look great. He also has a ball jointed neck, and true ball jointed hips and shoulders, the tail has two cut joints and the arms can also be moved. It is surprising how much articulation has been designed into the figure and it creates a very flexible item which you can get a lot of poses out of.

This is a very nice collectible which is reasonably price and surprisingly detailed for the size. It looks very much like the character from the film and clearly



a lot of effort has been put into accuracy of the design.

I have seen a lot of figures of about the same size from other companies which cannot match the detail or look lacklustre.

Another thing I like is that the pack includes a clear image on the back of the box and a good description of what you get so you know exactly what you are buying and know what other items are in the series. The Display base is also rather nice.

**Web:** <http://www.mezcotoyz.com>

**Heroes**  
**Future Hiro**  
**Mezco**  
**2008 Con**  
**Exclusive**

"My name is Hiro Nakamura. I'm from the future." - Future Hiro. Once a simple working class man, Hiro Nakamura discovers his ability to bend time and space to his will.



The Future Hiro from Mezco is a very nice larger sized item. It was a highly anticipated release and still is very much in demand. As one of the more important figures in the season of Heroes, Future Hiro includes the very detailed sword of Takezo Kensei, and a sword sheath.

This was a limited edition only released via Mezco direct and the 2008 conventions, but can still be found online. It was limited to 3000 pieces worldwide.

The figure is packaged in a clamshell box which is sturdy and protective. The sword is separately included with a sheath and is intricately sculpted, which is important considering its significance within the mythos of the figure.

This stunning 7 inch scale figure is beautifully produced and boasts nearly a dozen points of articulation and is impressively realistic. The detail on his outfit make him very lifelike and his face and hair are just as impressive.

This is a very high quality figure which is worth getting hold of, it will only get more difficult to find !

**Web:** <http://www.mezcotoyz.com>





Killer Watches are the ultimate reminder that our time is limited. Perhaps there is a perverse psychology in play here, maybe we need reminding there are those who could take our lives in a second. Life is brutally short - we should make the most of it.

Charles Manson, Ed Gein and Ted Bundy, their names may conjure images of terror yet if we are honest we are intrigued by their motives, their lives and their sickening sense of style, we are revolted and attracted at the same time.

Television is filled to the brim with forensic and detective dramas, true crime is all the rave having its own cable channel and the various news programs try to outdo each other with what they can show.

So, what is the ultimate Serial Collectible ? We have seen some great calendars and cards in earlier issues and a regular magazine is now available (see review this issue), but never watches – slaughter on your wrist !

These Killer Watches are superb collectibles, beautifully made, devilishly perverse and hopefully even offensive to weaker souls ! They have reliable movements, leather bands and the faces of the watches are clear and decorative. Each one includes the "Killer" logo and the face of a killer; there are twelve in all, to collect.

Bundy, Dahmer, Night Stalker, Gacy, Manson, Gein, BTK, Unabomber, Green River Killer, OJ Simpson, Scott Peterson and one for the ladies, Aileen Wuornos.

**Web:** <http://www.killerwatches.com/>

## The Vegan Zombie Tofu

**Applehead**

**7" PVC Figure**

**Web:** <http://www.tofutheveganzombie.com/>

"Tofu" is a friendly zombie, created from a botched experiment in Professor Vost's laboratory. Monkey # 5, one of Vost's lab animals, stuffed a block of tofu into the zombie boy's open skull after accidentally losing the brain. As a result, "Tofu" eats only vegetables and grains and has no taste for human meat. However, if "Tofu" ever loses his "tofu-brain", he turns into a dangerous zombie creature, craving human flesh.

Professor Vost's sole mission in life is to find a cure for the menacing zombie epidemic plaguing mankind. Vost believes the zombie pathogen to be viral, caused by the genetic manipulation of meat products.

The Evil Mallesteros, owner of the world's largest meat packing company, wants to shut down Professor Vost's research because sales from meat are beginning to suffer due to Vost's conclusive findings.

"Tofu" is able to walk among both the human and zombie world with safety and ease, however, he is never fully trusted or accepted by either group. The professor's daughter Addie helps "Tofu" blend into the human world by bringing him along with Lab Monkey #5 for fun and adventures. However, Lab Monkey #5's mischievous, playful nature always gets "Tofu" and Addie into trouble.

Because of his unique ability to intermingle in both worlds, and his harmless vegetarian nature, the professor believes "Tofu" to be the key in solving the Zombie epidemic. The question is; will he have enough time to find a cure....

This is a beautiful 7" PVC collectible toy with a removable tofu brain, it has five points of articulation and comes on a removable base. The colours of this item have to be seen to be believed, he is a





deadly shade of blue with a rather realistic piece of tofu in his head. His stand includes fruit, crates and veges and this makes him a uniquely vegan zombie collectible !

There have been various limited editions released (for example a white edition limited to 150). The current release is a real beauty, colourful, exceptionally detailed and with a very lifelike feel.

Careful you when you remove his Tofu brain, he will return to wanting human flesh !!

Tofu has been a real hit with the Vegetarian and Vegan Crowd and is hence a very unusual collectible—edgy, strange yet socially aware and cute to boot !

There is also a fantastic Tofu the Vegan Zombie animated short – indeed it took home four FMPTA Crystal Reel Awards for Best Animation, Best Sound, Best Director and Best Composer and that was only at one festival ! At the 2008 Telly Awards it was in the winning Categories of Children's Audience, Use of Animation, Use of Humor and Editing.

**See:** <http://www.tofutheveganzombie.com/movie>

## ZOMBIE HEAD ETSY.COM



There are many cheap imitations available on the market, but these are the original, high quality zombie heads. Professionally sculpted ghoulish accessories, you won't find such impressive items anywhere else – they are extremely detailed and hand-made.

These are very striking items, it is quite amazing just how much detail they can get onto each head. The eyes are little works of art, some are bloodshot, others swirls of green or whirling wheels. The teeth are superb and the overall texture impressive, some have strange staples to hold their heads in place, others are deformed beyond belief !

Zombie Heads also offer a range of ear rings and art work.

I have three Zombie heads in front of me and they are truly impressive. Each one has been hand sculpted using super sculptey, then baked to give them enough strength for daily wear, they seem remarkably strong and each items a solid metal ring for attachment to a necklace. Each one is hand painted ! They are truly beautifully grotesque items and a must have for anyone who loves the strange and bizarre.

**Web:** <http://www.zombiehead.Etsy.com>





**A NIGHTMARE OF HORROR!**



# DRACULA

**BELA LUGOSI · DAVID MANNERS**  
**HELEN CHANDLER · DWIGHT FRYE**  
*and EDWARD VAN SLOAN*

*A TOD BROWNING Production*

FROM THE FAMOUS PLAY AND NOVEL  
BY BRAM STOKER



**A UNIVERSAL RE-RELEASE**